

A House Full of People

By E. and M. Scharfen-Antink



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The House Full of People

A Story of Parisian Life

By

E. and M. SCHARTEN-ANTINK

Translated from the Dutch by J. Menzies Wilson

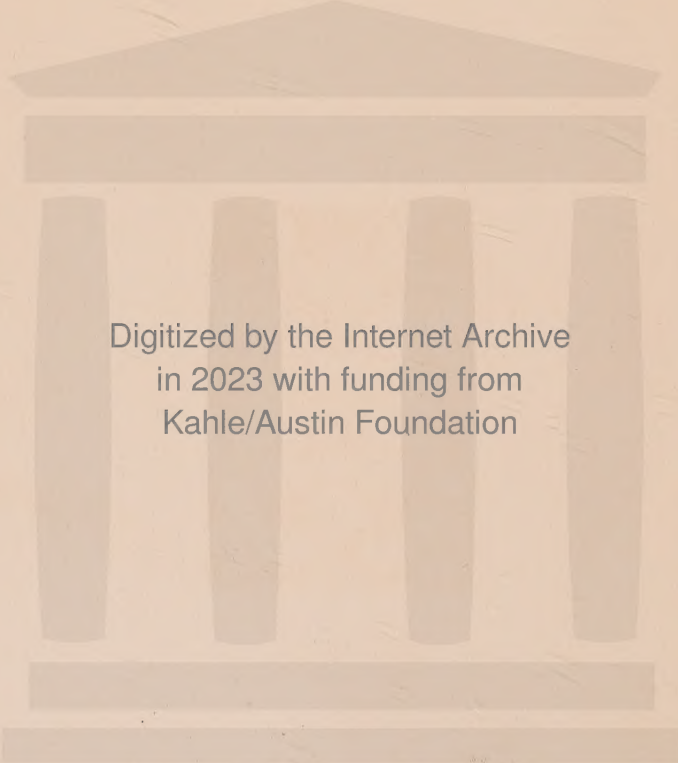
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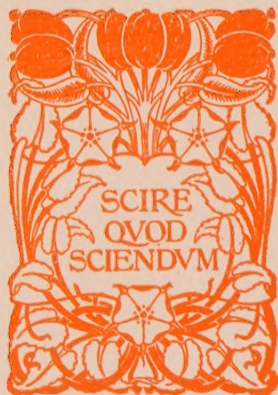
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CHAPTER 1

I

ARISTIDE stood in the stifling-hot attic-studio, looking very tall and slim, dressed in white linen trousers and a little coat, his bare feet in grey linen slippers; he held his portfolio and drawing-box under his arm. The window was open, but already the sun was beating in through the closed blinds; he hesitated a moment before starting off on his long journey to the garden, down six flights of stairs, and there was a look of repentance on his fair boyish face, with the little reddish beard.

"Au revoir . . . chérie . . ." he said pleadingly.

"Au revoir," came the curt answer in the shrill little voice of a woman from behind the turquoise-blue curtain which separated the corner of the garret for a bathroom, and it sounded sulky and indignant.

"Come now, chérie . . ." Aristide pleaded again.

"That's right . . . au revoir . . ." the little voice said still more impatiently, and at the same time the sponge was plunged noisily into the water.

Aristide placed his portfolio quietly against a chair, put his drawing-box on the crumby breakfast table, and went on tiptoe to the curtain, which he drew carefully. . . . In the pale light behind the soft turquoise, he saw the outline of a pure white shoulder and a rosy cheek bent down over the basin under a mass of black hair.

"Oh, little one . . . !" said Aristide, enraptured.

The girl turned round quickly, slipped a dressing-gown over her dewy back, and, turning away from him, sat down on the edge of a chair.

Then Aristide dropped the curtain, took his portfolio and box and left the room.

Outside, on the dark and narrow landing, it was a little less hot; there was a stuffy coolness, but on the second landing the heat was beating in through the curtainless window, and, looking down over the banisters, the stairs had the appearance of a long spiral, broken at every other turn by a strip of glaring light, whilst deep, deep down there rose a thin cloud of dust, showing clearer in the patches of sunshine, and from the depths came faintly the sound of sweeping in the corners of the stairs. He ran leisurely across the red-bordered stair-carpet which lay new and slippery on the shiny oak.

When he reached the third floor, he found the concierge, who, in his frock-coat, tightly buttoned up, was doing his morning round with the letters.

"Bonjour, m'sieur Carpentier," Aristide said in a friendly manner, and there was a sort of humility and a silent question in his attitude.

The concierge was a pale, sinewy little man with bushy black hair streaked here and there with grey, and a little jet-black moustache. There was a cast in his sightless left eye which gave him a curious and, at first sight, rather unprepossessing appearance.

In a friendly, good-tempered way, he murmured something which sounded like . . . ça . . . work . . . garden. . . .

Aristide, with a sweet smile, answered something about the joys of the garden in the morning, hesitated a moment . . . then his pale, violet-grey eyes gazed longingly up the stairs.

The door of the senator's apartment opened softly, a full, ruddy woman's face peeped out, disappeared again and

a hand with two large wedding rings was put out. The concierge handed her the only remaining packet. There were none for higher up. When the door was closed, he unbuttoned his cloth coat and drew it off his shoulders, waved his arms about to get cool, then followed Aristide down the stairs.

Aristide was going slower now, taking smaller steps, as if he wished to lengthen the trip together as much as possible.

And when the concierge looked down on him with his narrow shoulders, the outline of the shoulder-blades clearly visible through the thin linen coat, his long slender neck showing above the low collar, he said suddenly:

"And your little lady?"

Aristide glanced at him sideways, over his shoulder, with a melancholy look of pity on his face.

"Hot . . ." he said.

As the concierge said nothing more, they went on. On the little landing of the first floor, they met Madame Carpentier, who had finished her daily sweeping of the stairs so far; she stopped and made way for the two men. She was a buxom woman, young for her fifty years, and pleasant to look at even in her working clothes, which consisted of a broad, light-blue check bodice and a black skirt.

"It's hot upstairs . . ." said her husband with a meaning glance at Aristide, and he threw open his coat once more.

Aristide stood in a patient and ingratiating attitude, after a polite greeting to the concierge's wife, who had a decided liking for him, as they both came from the north.

Monsieur Carpentier now started talking to his wife in a quick undertone, turning his back on Aristide, who descended the last flight alone, stepping carefully on tiptoe in order to listen.

The whispered conversation, however, had developed into a loud discussion. He heard the words—"a cocotte" . . .

and a quick blush suffused his pale boyish face, but just as he was going down to the basement, he heard the concierge's step behind him.

"Emile, c'est toi qui le veut . . ." the woman admonished in a quarrelsome tone, but Monsieur Carpentier had already placed his hand on Aristide's shoulder.

"Let her come into the garden for an hour or two, in the afternoon . . . only, M'sieur Baroche, no nonsense . . . you know, in a respectable house, n'est-ce pas?"

Aristide put down his portfolio and box, and with a crimson face, stammered some hurried words of thanks; then laughingly he said, "many thanks," and rushed upstairs two steps at a time as though there were no such thing as a hot day, and panting another "thanks" as he passed the concierge's wife, he sprang up the stairs again.

II

Surrounded by walls,—on the left and back, a high one of little red Flemish bricks, on the right a rather lower one overgrown with ivy, and the back of the house with its forty-four windows, lay the garden of "No. 118," shaded by ancient elm-trees.

The garden was as long again as it was broad, and was divided into six little gardens, three on either side of the central path, which led straight from the back door with its little step of cobblestones, through hedges and wooden railings to the six little outhouses which, under one mossy roof, lay tucked in by the high wall, under the elms.

These little outhouses were used as cellars by the occupants of the thirteen apartments which did not have a cellar in the cavernous basement under the house. The little gardens, however, did not belong to one apartment or another, but were let separately, and only the two front ones had been let, the others were neglected and empty.

The first garden belonged to Madame Dutoit, who had a shop for priests' hats, two flights up.

Behind the cobble-steps, where M. Carpentier performed his morning ablutions, by the little Norton pump, it lay quietly surrounded by its high wooden fence, with a small porch covered with convolvulus.

There was an apple-tree, and a weather-beaten silver ball on a black base, glittering in the sunlight. At the other end a pergola of Virginia creeper had been constructed, which served as a chicken-run. The great mouse-grey cat, Ninouche, would often steal carefully over the branching creeper and springy woodwork and watch with his narrow yellow eyes the hens, of which he really was afraid.

Behind the arbour, uncared for, lay the second garden. There were still more traces of the design of the garden as it used to be, amidst the long grass and young elm-shoots, shaded by elder-bushes and an almond-tree.

The third garden was not even separated from the path by a railing, just a little patch of fallow, weed-grown earth under an elm.

The gardens on the left side were in a better state. The first was separated from the path by a high fence, completely covered with foliage of convolvulus, which on a sunny morning, under the shady elms, looked one mass of snowy blossoms. The growth of these flowers was so luxuriant that thick chains of stalks, intertwined, trailed in bunches of leaves and blossoms over the little garden and the path. Long cords of foliage had been trained to grow over a triangular piece of canvas which formed a roof over a corner of the next garden. Seated on a low chair with a bright cushion, might often be seen a pale, delicate woman, past her first youth, whose soft fawn-like eyes would continually steal from her sewing and scan the back of the house with its many windows; should some one appear at one of the windows, then she would greet them with a slow

casting-down of her heavy eyelids, whilst a painful smile would flicker round her pallid lips.

Between the high brick wall and the elm-tree in the neighbouring garden, a miserable-looking cage had been constructed out of bits of wood and old planks, in which there were four hens, two white pigeons and a couple of guinea-pigs.

The next garden had an equally high railing, but it was quite bare. There was a little patch of black sand, and a strongly built summer-house against the brick wall. This hut, the sloping thatched roof of which rested on four stout tree trunks, had long been the undisputed territory of a small Cyprus cat, which slept in a basket and was visited every morning by a refined-looking maidservant who brought it a little bowl of milk and a plate of finely chopped liver.

The third garden, damp under the thick shade of the three elms, had become a mass of weeds, without either path or bed. On the side of the little outhouses, a climbing plant managed to flourish, a plant with light, velvety, heart-shaped leaves, as large as a child's head, and, Mademoiselle Julie, Mademoiselle Lefournier's maid, came there daily about dinner-time with a little basket and a pair of scissors to pick some for her fruit-dishes.

III

Aristide had fetched his easel and high stool out of the out-house where he left it at night, and in the sultry shade which flooded almost the entire patch of ground, he set to work.

The six gardens lay there calm and deserted in the early June morning; all the blinds of the high yellow house were closed against the sun's scorching rays, and no one appeared outside.

The little Cyprus cat had nestled deep down in its basket and Ninouche slept on undisturbed, on the little canvas roof between the convolvulus leaves, as if in a hammock.

The only sound was the soft clucking of a hen in one of the runs, or a faint flapping of wings as a bird moved in the trees.

Aristide was thinking . . . he drew thick charcoal lines on the paper, which was already well covered, looked at them attentively, thickened them, rubbed them out again; sometimes he would flick the paper with the tip of his nail to remove some of the black; then he would gaze at the convolvulus in the next garden.

He sat on his high stool with a very straight back, his knees well drawn up, his bare pink heels, which showed out of his slippers, resting on the rungs of his stool.

Then, at nine o'clock, Célestin made his appearance.

Célestin was a plump, rosy little fellow. He wore wide brown corduroy trousers and a skin-tight blue and white striped flannel shirt, and well at the back of his massive head, with thick locks of dark hair showing all round, a black velvet cap with a sparkling stone on one side.

"Bonjour Bouboule!" said Aristide.

"Bonjour Bibi!" said Célestin.

Aristide and Célestin both hailed from Roubaix. Aristide was the son of a schoolmaster—his father had died ten years ago, his mother, still alive, was always ailing. Célestin, an orphan, had been brought up by his uncle, the verger of St. Martin's. Ever since their twelfth year, they had shared all the prizes at the School of Art at Roubaix, and when they were nineteen, they each gained a scholarship enabling them to go and study in Paris. They were to apply themselves more particularly to industrial art and they had been admitted to the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs in the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine. Aristide and Célestin had lived for seven months together in an attic-studio above a timber

warehouse; they had got to know Paris with its beauty and its sweet dangers, and together, at times, they had worked hard. Then Aristide had fallen in love seriously, dreamed of his own home, and went in search of a room where he might live with his sweetheart.

One morning, near the omnibus by the Odéon, he had met stout Madame Carpentier who hailed from a little village inn, near Roubaix, where in shady nooks, beneath the chestnut trees, Célestin and he had experienced their first amours.

The concierge's wife remembered the merry little artist, whom she had seen amusing himself in her father's tap-room during her recent visits. Aristide knew people from her village, and she knew people in Roubaix; they were like old friends at once and had plenty to say about "the son of the Mayor," about "poor père Lebue," and "poor M'sieur Trouillet." . . . With boyish friendliness and courtesy, Aristide accompanied her to the Rue Barral, and with a delightful mixture of shyness, but, at the same time, knowing full well how easily a Parisian makes excuses for youth, he told her of his future ménage, and Madame Carpentier, like most middle-aged women, thought what a charming boy he was. And so it came about that Aristide and his little mistress found themselves on the sixth floor of a house, where the "loge" always persistently opposed anything that was not strictly correct and in conformity with the registrar's office.

The girl herself, much more simple, and at the same time less narrow-minded, had urged living in a different quarter; she wished to go to a more Bohemian neighbourhood, where living would be cheaper, and they would be free to do as they liked; there, also, she could have cooked and washed herself. . . . But Aristide, with provincial respectability and boyish dreams of an "artistic home" and "blissful love," had recoiled from the idea of that sort of life, which seemed

to him rough and poverty-stricken; he preferred a cheerful house in a wide street; just a small room, if need be, right at the top, but where they would be ideally happy and Jozette would not have to do menial work. He wished to enjoy to the full this new life with a girl, of which he had read only in books, but which had now become a reality. They would dine, he and his little powdered Parisian mistress, in restaurants in the midst of all the allurements of the Parisian world.

He had furnished the attic very daintily, he thought—with a little money, a great deal of trouble, and much help from Célestin, but every day he worked in Célestin's studio where there was plenty of room, until, on the first hot day at the end of June, the concierge had given him permission to make use of one of the little gardens with a summer-house, whose owner had died. After that Célestin came to Aristide. Only the girl was not allowed to sit with them: "a cocotte under her roof" . . . Madame Carpentier said in the loge, " . . . well, because of Monsieur Aristide . . . but, a cocotte in the garden giving offence to every one . . . that never!"

Aristide had submitted rather easily to that order, although, after a little scene upstairs, he would sometimes tell Célestin, with a solemn face, that it was the last time if she could not come too; but, the next morning, he would be there again.

Then, one day, when the temperature was ninety degrees in the shade, Célestin came into the attic suddenly and found the girl half-ill, clad in a pink cotton dressing-gown and black slippers, sweeping the polished floor. He closed the door immediately and was just as much struck by the dainty little ankles against the red stones as by the hot pale little face under the damp hair.

And since that morning he had almost quarrelled with Aristide; it was ridiculous to be so jealous; why should

Jozette not sit in the Luxembourg in the afternoon? Just because her former lover worked there? Surely that was no fault of hers? Why should she have to suffer for that? How could he allow it? . . . when not more than a hundred yards away, it was delightfully shady in the Avenue de l'Observatoire.

"Thierry sketches there too," . . . said Aristide obstinately; "Thierry makes the whole garden unsafe . . . yesterday I saw him by the Fontaine de Carpeaux."

"No wonder you are jealous," Célestin would tease him, when the other one remained calm under his thrusts—"Thierry is making a name as an artist. . . . Thierry exhibits at Bernhem's . . . Jozette has been in clover with Thierry . . . better off than she is now . . . you had better be careful . . . comparisons are odious. . . ."

Then Aristide would blush a deep red and bite his lips, and Célestin, with necessary excitement, declare once more that he did not choose to sit in the garden if those wretches allowed that little soul to die of heat under the roof.

"Let's go to the Luxembourg!" he suggested wildly. But they did not do so . . . they were both very busy with the contribution which they had to send to the municipal drawing exhibition at Roubaix. They could work so undisturbed in that garden, without inquisitive glances from passers-by. . . . They required the garden and so they continued to come there.

"Bouboule," said Aristide, when they had worked in silence for some time, and his pale violet eyes gazed up at the closed attic window, with devotion and ecstasy, "she is coming down this afternoon."

With an abrupt, foolish gesture, Célestin suddenly flung his pencil and drawing-pen on the garden-path, and slapped his plump knees with his two plump hands.

"Sapristi!" he said—"And did . . . ?" Aristide told

him softly what had occurred. As a second sign of rejoicing, he threw his tam o' shanter with the sparkling stone high in the air and caught it again on his forefinger, waved it madly about, pulled it well over his massive head with both hands and then went to pick up his pencil and drawing-pen.

"Idiot," said Aristide. Then they both set to work again.

Aristide was designing a frieze of convolvulus for a bathroom, and Célestin was trying to find motives for a painting on glass. Aristide sketched very calmly, always well pleased with his attempts. He liked them, but thought he might do better still and began afresh. He drew the outline of a twig, put in a leaf or two, worked in light and shade . . . looked again, rubbed something out, rested a moment dreamily, then gazed pensively at the branches and garlands of convolvulus. "Nature, always nature!" was his favourite maxim.

Célestin was more energetic, struggled with small and large drawing-copies and little pictures out of botanical books. Combination! Imagination! Style! was the chief motive of his more complicated but at the same time more radical and hidebound theories. Sometimes, his large head hot with excitement, he would hold forth at length on this subject to Aristide, who had heard it all before and was, meanwhile, thinking of something else.

When Aristide set out for Paris, as to the land of Promise, he had hoped to take up "High Art" instead of industrial art and had great illusions of becoming a famous artist. Célestin, however, was an advocate for industrial art which he connected with vague ideas concerning "Evolution" and "Social Ideas." And his manner of work was as confused and hasty as his manner of talking.

He scribbled and scratched with sudden spurts of energy for a few minutes, made miniature designs in the corner of his paper, which he submitted by the dozen to Aristide's judgment. Aristide looked at them long and kindly, found

something good in all of them and spoke gentle words of praise and advice. Célestin, who at the bottom, had a great admiration for Aristide, expressed his approval or disapproval of his sketches with violent gesticulations; but Aristide never answered him: his light pensive eyes gazed into space as he stroked his little beard.

There was a shuffling on the gravel in the little garden behind the convolvulus hedge. It was Madame Leguënné, who, with the stealthy movements of a ferret, was carrying her chair and her sewing under the convolvulus roof. She sat there against the foliage and white blossoms, in her brick-red dressing-gown, her slim body slightly bent, and her head with its parchment-coloured cheeks, dark amber by the eyes, weighed down by a knot of heavy hair, piled high above her forehead. Her long thin arms rested wearily on the work on her lap, and she greeted the two artists silently, raising the languishing lids from her dark, fawn-like eyes, a faint smile flickered round her bloodless lips.

Aristide nodded cheerfully, Célestin, a little less so; the woman irritated him.

"It's hot . . . very hot . . . this morning," Aristide started his daily conversation.

"Oh, Monsieur Baroche . . . she said with a deep sigh of self-pity. She gazed at him with her vacant dark eyes through the meshes of the wire netting . . . then, as if rejoicing over a suddenly discovered, mutual understanding, she went cheerfully on with her sewing.

"Fool," Célestin thought. Aristide glanced through his eyelashes at the outline of cheek, neck and shoulder, the effect of the shadowy parchment-coloured skin and the red against the dusky foliage of the convolvulus. Beyond the patches of shade under the elms, the heat was almost visible. The guinea-pigs uttered plaintive little sounds from under a plank in the large hen-coop, but the hens lay motionless in the sand. Toto, the Cyprus cat, lay in its basket as if uncon-

scious, her four paws outstretched, and Ninouche had disappeared. No one spoke.

It remained like this for some time. There was no wind rustling in the leaves and the house-front was a painful glare to the eyes.

Aristide, in nothing but his thin coat and trousers, felt the heat badly; he undid a button at the neck. Célestin was never too hot.

They both worked on steadily; Madame Leguënne stitched industriously at her white stuff.

"And your little lady, M'sieur Baroche?" the woman's voice inquired presently from the other side of the fence.

"She is very well," said Aristide.

"She is coming to sit in the garden with us this afternoon," Célestin remarked suddenly.

"Ah . . . !" said the woman amazed, and her large eyes gazed into space, as if seeking to find the solution to a riddle.

"Indeed . . ." she said, perplexed. A little later she tied up her work and went into the house.

IV

In the afternoon when the sun no longer shone on the yellow house, but threw patches of red and bright green light on the leaves and mossy tiles of the outhouse-roofs, the summerhouse with its small square of sand lay in the cool shade.

Aristide and Célestin were in a festive mood. Célestin was wearing a clean cotton shirt of cornflower blue with lighter stripes, and Aristide had donned a new white coat.

Between the two easels was an empty camp-stool.

And, on the stroke of three, a dainty little woman came quietly out of the back door and walked down the centre path between the gardens. There was a suspicion of powder on her pale little round face with the almond-shaped brown

eyes and the delicate nose, her thick black hair was brought half-way across her cheeks and over her ears and gathered into a knot at her neck. She was wearing a white muslin wrap with a small purple spot and a full flounce over the hips and smaller flounces at the wrists, a cream linen skirt and white shoes and stockings.

"Bonjour, mes amis," she said in a demure and friendly voice, opening the gate.

"Vive Jozette!" cried Célestin in his usual exuberant spirits. The girl started and with a charming gesture, laid her two small forefingers on the pouting rosy lips. From the right little finger an emerald-green silk bag dangled on a thin cord. . . .

She closed the garden-gate and sat down on the camp-stool which Aristide drew up, in the same contented and demure manner. . . .

Then they glanced at each other in turns and smiled gently.

"How cool!" said the girl with a sigh of pleasure. "It's like champagne!" she said later.

Célestin and Aristide worked with a great show of industry, and succeeded better than ever.

A small ball of red silk appeared out of the green silk bag, also a crochet-needle, then, industriously like a busy little woman who loses no time, her fingers set to work. The red silk lace dropped like a thin vermilion snake from her white hands into her lap.

Aristide, with his pale dreamy eyes, looked up constantly from his work at her; she smiled at him, and Célestin, very busy sketching a convolvulus leaf pinned to a shiny picture out of a botanical book, looked at them slyly and whistled sentimentally the drawling song which was favourite for the moment:

"J'aime surtout ma Pai-impolaise . . ."

Then, after a while, Jozette was asked to advise them

about their work. She had been a great deal among artists, and so picking up a smattering of information here and there, she had acquired a certain amount of real knowledge on the subject.

Célestin showed her his page full of small designs. She criticized, praised and encouraged him kindly.

Then she had to admire Aristide's sketch and said with loving conviction that it was "very good," but really "very good."

"Ah, what a day!" said Célestin with a deep sigh. It was stuffy even in the shade, there was not a breath of wind in the heavy hot air, but they sat there so peacefully in their thin clothes and all they could see of the stifling summer day in the town was a strip of cloudless grey-blue sky above the house and in the back garden by the old wall patches of tawny-red sunlight among the mass of dark and bright green foliage.

Now and again, in the distance, they would hear the deep groaning clang of the tram on the Boulevard St. Michel or a shrill whistle of the underground railway from the little Port-Royal station, a dim rumbling sound and then the heavy stillness brooded once more over the garden.

But the house began to wake up now that the shade outside became more bearable than the stuffiness of the rooms; blinds were drawn up, whilst with little hollow sounds re-echoing in the garden, windows were thrown open against the yellow walls.

"You would think," said Jozette, glancing up at the closed attic-apartment, "that it would be all right upstairs in the shade . . . but, under the roof it remains hot till about six o'clock. Yesterday, at this time, I almost fainted, so I went and sat on my little chair on the landing, in the dark. It was better there . . . and then I fell asleep. . . ."

She laughed a low clear laugh, a row of merry white teeth showing between her rosy lips.

On the right side of the first floor, another pair of shutters was thrown open with a thud.

"Hahaaa . . . lalalala" . . . a loud rude yawn suddenly resounded through the trees, transposed into a suitable cadence for the sake of decency.

"Don't look, Jozette," Célestin said quickly, "it's M'sieur Gros."

M. Gros stood by the window, broad and sunburnt, with blue-black chin and grey military moustache and gazed with his small pleasant eyes at the artist's pretty little *grisette* in the garden.

A moment later his wife's small face, rather like that of a mouse, peeped over his shoulder and disappeared immediately. Then the low murmuring of a sulky voice could be heard far back in the room, and Monsieur turned away from the window, shrugging his shoulders peevishly.

It was quite still in the garden for a short time.

Then, from the first floor on the left, came the sound of a soft tapping on the window-panes:

"J'aime surtout ma Pai-impolaïse."

"Don't look, Jozette!" Aristide warned in a jealous whisper, "it is Doctor Valency."

Jozette fixed her large eyes demurely on her lace and crocheted hard, but she had just caught a glimpse of him, small with a swarthy skin, black eyes, a straggly black beard and moustache, a very southern type.

The tapping was continued for a little, then stopped.

Later, with a rumbling thud and a transitory glitter, the windows opened inwards and the dark cavity of the room yawned behind. The doctor disappeared.

At that moment, a loud conversation took place in the nextdoor garden: something was explained in a shrill woman's voice; "No, thank you," came the answer more gruffly, and then a door banged.

The stillness became even more intense; in the distance the city murmured like a sea. . . .

It was half-past four. The shady side of the house with its open shutters and windows looked cool and pleasant. It was the most delightful hour of the day; it was still warm, but it was a different and clearer heat from that of the morning and the silence of the garden was also different. The evening was still distant, and yet, there was something of the evening in the fullness of the day. The fragrance of the green also seemed stronger and more refreshing than in the morning.

It was during this hour that Célestin would often put down his busy pencil, and leaning back in his chair, sit and dream for a while as Aristide did half the day.

The girl also laid aside her crochet and sat gazing into space, her small folded hands resting on the green bag.

"What a day!" said Célestin.

Jozette nodded faintly several times. Everything was so pleasant; it was delicious, restful and cool . . . that kind Célestin, he was so pleased that she was there too! and Aristide, that boy with his white coat over his bare chest, he also had been so sweet to her. . . .

"Don't look, Jozette," Aristide warned again, and behind her back, he said to Célestin:

"It's Monsieur Lourty."

"Monsieur the érotomane," Célestin grumbled.

"What do you mean by érotomane?" Jozette inquired, and unconsciously she allowed the inquisitive glance of her large shining eyes to stray towards the house. At a window on the fourth floor she saw the good-looking, extraordinarily fresh face of a man, whose keen light eyes were fixed steadily on her. For one moment her glance was held by those strange staring eyes; then she saw the man put his hand up to his forehead with an infatuated gesture and look round rather shyly. Startled, she picked up her

crochet-work again and bent her head down over it without a word to the other two.

"Is he still there?" she asked after a little time had elapsed, without looking up.

At first the two boys, Aristide with a vivid blush, staring straight at their paper, had endured the disconcerting glance, pretending to pay no attention to him. Then Célestin looked: yes, he was still there, bending out of the window, his face a fiery red with glaring eyes. His gaze was fixed on Jozette . . . he did not notice the artist looking up. At last Célestin, who was furious, motioned him to go away with a gesture of the hand, and the man appeared to go.

"He has gone," said Aristide and all three breathed more freely.

Then Célestin told a short, rather sordid tale of something he knew about Lourty; it was quite short, but it seemed out of place on this lovely afternoon.

They worked on in silence.

The little Cyprus cat created the first diversion. She had been awake outside her basket for some time and at last she came softly nearer on her cushioned paws, and unobserved had sat motionless, encircled by her thick tail, her gaze fixed on the red cord which trembled on Jozette's fingers. Suddenly Jozette felt the light touch of the animal's claws against her leg and uttered a shrill little cry.

"Don't be silly," said Aristide ". . . it's Toto . . . come Toto . . . !" But Toto stayed near Jozette; the small grey eyes, fringed by long reddish hair, kept a steady watch on her lap where the red thread had moved. Jozette put her bag and work near her on the chair, scratched her linen skirt with her nail and Toto risked the jump, wondered for one instant where that red thing had gone, then liking the feeling of the lap, began to purr, turned round twice and settled down.

Célestin and Aristide, who had been watching, could not help laughing.

"Sjt," Jozette implored. She stroked the animal's firm silky head very gently and did not move.

Now and then she would glance on the sly to see if the window on the fourth floor remained unoccupied. . . .

"Only women are coming to the windows now," she said after a little.

"Who?" Célestin inquired. . . .

Jozette did not know them.

"A fat one with greasy hair," she said, "in a red blouse."

"Madame Dutoit," decided Aristide.

"And a tall fair one in a snow-white apron on the same floor."

"Mademoiselle Lefournier," answered Célestin.

"Of course not," said Aristide, "you know she lives on the third over Dutoit. . . ."

"A baker's apron with sleeves," explained Jozette.

"By Jove, that's Madame Bertin in her operation coat—you know, Célestin, the ventouseuse!"

The boys, who were essentially provincial, had not been satisfied until they had learnt the name and business of all the people in the house.

And while they were still laughing, Jozette described a little woman with a yellow face, a reddish nose, and black hair dressed high on her head, just like a Japanese—but neither Célestin nor Aristide could make out from that description who she could be.

Jozette did not tell them that several of these women turned away as if hurt, in a scornful manner whenever their glance met hers.

At the landing between the third and fourth floor, another woman's face appeared. . . . Aristide saw her.

"Mademoiselle Antoinette, Toto's mother," he said. "What a Tartar she looks!" Jozette thought.

The two artists related in turns: it was M'sieur Levêque's servant, the man who had died in January—that apartment had been locked up for six months on account of the books . . . which were to be sent to the Sorbonne, so the concierge maintained. The servant was only allowed to use the kitchen, she slept in the hall—all the walls of all the four rooms were lined with books . . .

But Jozette had not been listening. Like a danger coming nearer and nearer, she had heard Mademoiselle Antoinette hurrying downstairs, past the curtainless landing windows.

Now she was standing at the back door.

"Toto, Toto!" Her voice was hoarse with rage.

"Toto, Toto!" She came running up the centre path between the little gardens.

The animal did not move in Jozette's lap.

"Toto, Toto!" the woman urged again. She was standing in a threatening attitude with a scornful face at the open gate behind which the three were sitting.

Then with a cutting laugh Jozette took hold of the animal's body and threw her down at the woman's feet, where she landed supple and light on her paws, though mewling softly.

Then she laughed again, a short sharp laugh. . . .

The servant took Toto in her arms, stroked her and uttered little pitying noises, then banged the gate behind her.

For a moment the artists were dismayed. Aristide was as white as a sheet at first, then the blood rushed to his cheeks. Célestin, his kind face a fiery red, gave a pained, rather embarrassed laugh, large beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead.

And still silent, they watched the woman go past the staircase windows, the pussy-cat looking tiny in her arms, and every now and then she would glance at them disdainfully through a window.

Jozette gazed straight in front of her. An angry wrinkle showed between her half-closed eyes, and her lips closed in passionate resentment.

"That woman is so infatuated about her cat that she cannot bear any one else coming near it. . . ." Célestin said, trying to excuse her.

But Jozette answered nothing, and when Aristide stroked her hair gently, she snapped out "Leave me alone!"

"Never mind, Jozette," Célestin said soothingly.

Jozette sat bolt upright in her little chair; there were glittering lights in her eyes like those of a wild cat.

"Trrrra . . . la-la-la-la-la!" she cried suddenly in a loud hoarse voice like that of a boy, and which resounded like a wave of scorn against the house.

"Jozette! Jozette!" Célestin and Aristide implored simultaneously.

Then as if by that explosion she had satisfied her desire for revenge on the hostile house, her little face softened again; she looked first at Aristide, then at Célestin, as if she were amazed at herself and laughed.

"All the same, Jozette . . ." Aristide said, setting more upright than ever, as if he were going to scold her; but Célestin cut short the lecture firmly.

"She was quite right, quite right!"

All three were silent. But the air was not clear yet.

All at once Célestin had an inspiration. He began to hum a studio song; that was sure to cheer them up. . . .

"La peinture, ture, ture,"

And, of his own accord, Aristide joined in, an octave higher, in his nasal tenor:

"Ceux qui n'ont pas de pelo.
Ils la font a l'eau."

"Go on," said Jozette approvingly.

"La sculpture, ture, ture,"

Célestin began again in his deep bass, and all three sang softly on:

"Ceux qui n'ont pas de braise,
Ils le font en glaise" . . .

They felt better! Jozette moved in her chair, brushed back her hair which had got slightly damp, away from her eyes, and smiled sweetly at Aristide.

"Le casque du pompier!" Célestin announced—but Aristide, more wary, warned them not to make too much noise after what the concierge had said. . . .

"What does it matter?" said Célestin.

"No, let us be careful; a moment ago the German came to the window; afterwards. . . ."

But when Jozette, with a hurried upward glance, rested her head against him for one moment and whispered "l'escalier," he almost gave in, though he shook his head.

"Will you sing 'L'escalier' alone then, you two often sang in the afternoons and surely they can't object to that.

And after a moment's shyness, because the others liked the way he did it, Aristide started, dwelling a ridiculous time on the first note.

"Un . . . escalier . . ."

It was a song which they had just heard in the "Noctambules."

"Un escalier qui n'auriat pas de marches
Ne serait pas du tout un escalier . . ."

Célestin applauded with his fat hands in cabaret fashion, clapping three times, then again three times, strictly in time: tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tap, adding in a loud whisper: "Three cheers for our famous singer, M'sieur Aristide Baroche!" and pretending that his voice had not yet broken, he sang in a shrill hoarse voice:

"Un escalier"

And immediately the two others joined in, already a little louder. . . .

When they had finished they worked on in silence for a while. Once more Jozette's little face was placid and white, her hair was brushed away from her forehead, her large dark eyes gazed with a sweet pensive expression into the shady garden where the leaves in the tree-tops alone were still golden.

Two pigeons flew from one elm to another, flapping their wings lazily, paused a moment and then flew on, their silver-grey, pearly wings standing out against the soft blue of the sky.

"I shall finish my design to-day," Aristide remarked.

"Mine will be nearly done too," said Célestin.

They looked at each other's work, were astonished at each other's progress, and in high spirits they started another song. Though she was not aware of it, Jozette felt her blood tingle with the thrilling joys of wild evening revelries, softened by the sweetness of the afternoon. . . .

"Rentrez vos femmes et vos filles
Voilà les quatz'arts qui passent."

Jozette sang now with enthusiasm, her eyes dancing with excitement. The artists were delighted with her and Jozette laughed happily like a cooing dove.

"Oh, what a day," Célestin said for the third time. And they chattered cheerfully about the delightful afternoons they were going to have; if only the weather would keep fine!

"To think that I shall never again have to sit in that stifling attic," Jozette sighed.

The three felt so contented that they had forgotten all about the house and its inmates.

Usually at about six o'clock they would begin to tidy up their things; now Jozette had to warn them twice:

"Boys, it is supper-time!"

It was past seven when Célestin put away their belongings in the summer-house and the other two went upstairs to change.

CHAPTER 2

I

IT was the first day of Monsieur Carpentier's summer-holiday week.

Usually, as soon as the morning letters had been distributed, he would hastily change his official frock-coat for his working-jacket, take the tram Montparnasse-Bastille and arrive just before eight o'clock at his workshop in the Rue du Fer-à-Moulin, the wholesale firm of Palliers-Frères, where he was employed in cutting out kid gloves and ladies' belts.

Now, clad in his blue overall, he had spent a quiet morning on the pavement chatting to the wife of the school-janitor on the left, to the owner of the dairy on the right, and to the white-coated hall-porter of the Physical Laboratory on the opposite side of the road; he had had a shave and had drunk a glass of cool cider at a neighbouring coal-merchant's who kept a "zinc," and in the afternoon, sitting in the arm-chair at the open street-window of their loge, he took his wife's place and looked after the house. They shared the holiday quite fairly, and in the afternoon Madame Carpentier went shopping or she would visit her daughter-in-law.

It was too hot that day for many people to call at the loge; only at four o'clock, when the sun had disappeared behind the high Laboratory building, he had been able to open the shutters, and now, in a contented holiday mood, he was resting after the hot afternoon; he thoroughly enjoyed

an hour or two alone in their little room, though at the same time he was slightly bored.

At three o'clock he had bought a *Patrie* from a passing newspaper boy; he had read every word of the paper, even the serial; the author had no style and was behind the times in his ideas, he considered. Carefully and patiently he had rolled a number of cigarettes with his square-tipped fingers, horny with the handling of much leather, and then he smoked them, puffing away contentedly.

His head, above the blue crumpled shirt-front, looked like a pale and bony mask, the forehead high and narrow, surmounted by a line of greyish bristly hair.

Now and then, almost mechanically, his hand from out the blue sleeve made its way to the window-sill, and with his outstretched forefinger he would flick the dark ash of his cigarette outside.

The warm weather and the quiet made him drowsy, and finally he just sat staring dreamily into space, his one sightless eye almost closed beneath the lid which he could not always keep under control.

They had a small loge, very small, but bright because it looked down on to the street. So many houses, even in this sparsely built district, had their loge looking out over the courtyard, and such courtyards sometimes! Here it was light and pleasant, and healthier too. When, on Sundays, his son and daughter-in-law came to dinner, Louis, the boarder, was forced to go to a restaurant—there was no room for five—but apart from that they had all they could wish for. He had his wages, free lodging, his tips from the house, and what they saved on Louis' board. . . . His only son had been married in the spring; with any luck he might be able to retire when he was seventy . . . but then there must be no more mishaps like the one they had last winter, when Marcel had been out of work for three months. Of course he had helped them, but, sapristi!

that was a big lump from his savings. . . . However, the young housewife had also got a place as a concierge, quite near, in the Rue de Bréa, and Marcel was employed at a good tailor's; it seemed there was a grandchild on the way. . . . Oh, no, it would not be so bad to work for another year or two. . . . Only there would still be plenty of difficulties to overcome, till that time, as regards his management of the house. . . . It was not easy to keep everything going.

The inquiry window of the glass loge-door was opened, and a tall heavily built man poked his red face, like that of a well-to-do gentleman-farmer, inside, and inquired if there were any letters for him.

"No, Monsieur le Sénateur," said Carpentier, waking from his slumbers with a start. And as he was still answering, he rose obsequiously from his chair and went to look on the bed, where the letters and parcels were arranged on the lace coverlet.

"There are none, Monsieur le Sénateur. . . ."

The senator threw back his head a little as if to say: "I am surprised," then as if by the way, he said:

"They are jolly downstairs!"

At the open front door he put up his grey silk sunshade, just managed to escape a watering-cart which passed as he was crossing the street to go to the Luxembourg.

Carpentier rolled a new cigarette, then went on dreaming in the sultry-fresh town air which was wafted in from the damp asphalt. For one moment there was a wave of the scent of flowers; a man was going by on the pavement, carrying his basket of roses and carnations on his back; even when his cries came from the distance of several houses, the sweet fragrance of the flowers remained in the still air.

"M'sieur Lourty, if you please!" said a man in uniform imperiously as he opened the loge door wide.

"Fourth on the left," answered Carpentier sullenly.

"That is the second to-day," he thought as he heard the man tramp up the stairs with noisy footsteps.

Two minutes later he passed the loge door again. Carpentier had got up, and opening the window—"Paid?" he asked.

The man shook his head; did he think they were to be trusted? Carpentier's facial contortion indicated something between yes and no.

"All the same, they mean well," he pleaded now.

"Indeed," said the man and left.

Carpentier remained at the little window a moment, as he heard some one come down the stairs. . . .

"Oh . . . !" he thought, when the precise tapping of a walking-stick between uneven footsteps on the last steps had told him who was coming, and he was on the point of shutting the window—but the new arrival started talking loudly and shrilly.

She was rather stout, a rosy smart woman, who walked with a limp, her black-clad hip jerking up against her red silk blouse at irregular intervals.

"Who are these people in the garden? . . . such a noise and singing. . . ."

Carpentier's face became expressionless, and his one squint-eye peered at her in a curiously sly manner from between his wrinkled eyelids.

"It's youth, madame . . . Dutoit, just youth!" he said sharply.

She restrained her indignation, and said in a rather threatening tone of voice:

"There are others besides myself who will complain!" Whereupon she left the house, the red poppies on her shady black straw hat beating time with her angry footsteps and the passionate tapping of her stick upon the stones.

As soon as the front door was closed, Carpentier hurried along the hall to listen. Up from the basement stairs came the sound of merry singing from the distance with a constantly recurring refrain of *ture, ture, ture . . . !*

Carpentier was up in arms immediately in his official capacity; he could not possibly allow such behaviour . . . he did not mind a song occasionally, when they were alone . . . but now with *her* . . . one could hear her above the others . . . he simply could not allow it.

The singing stopped. . . . Carpentier breathed again. . . . Not a sound to be heard. He went into the loge again.

After all, he thought, that lame fool Dutoit, *sacré-nom*, she has no right to find fault . . . at her age, she had lived already a long time unmarried with that Lorraine Jew . . . and then that silly shop for priests' hats which she kept.

His peaceful summer afternoon's dream had suddenly come to an end. He was again confronted with the thought of all the difficulties of his responsible position. . . . He did not find it easy to be a good concierge and at the same time keep peace throughout the house. . . . "Knowledge of human nature and tact," the hall-porter next door was in the habit of saying. . . . Well, he had plenty of that . . . his wife was, perhaps, rather too hasty, a little rough, possibly a bit Flemish; but she was a capable woman, and together they managed to keep things in splendid order. The landlord held them in great respect.

And what a muddle they had found things in three years ago when they came! On the floor above them, a poverty-stricken family with a large number of children; on the second, an untidy crowd of actors from the Cluny theatre; on the third, two Russian lady students whose furniture was not worth a hundred francs, and who cooked messy food in their kitchen, the odour of which pervaded the

whole staircase. Now the house was an ornament to the street; the most aristocratic people might be proud to live here. Was there not a senator and a doctor, who was so rich that he did not wish to practise and still went to the University? And yet Monsieur Valency must be thirty-five . . . he was sure to become one of the leading specialists, then Monsieur Gros . . . a gentleman of leisure. And Mademoiselle Lefournier, did she not have carriages from the Faubourg St. Germain at the door? And had they not housed the great Levêque, who possessed numbers of valuable books, so that his rooms were still under seal, six months after his death? They were in charge, and that brought quite a nice little sum too. And yet there were weak spots in the house. Madame Leguënné and her lawsuit which had been dragging on for months . . . her husband drank . . . and sometimes did not come home for a week at a time . . . but she was of some use to them, she looked after their loge when they were both out at the same time, and she lived tucked away downstairs; his wife had good-naturedly put her card in the loge window: "Hand and machine sewing done." Then the young painter with that . . . Hortense had shown herself weak there; still . . . Baroche. . . .

What was that noise?

And empty cab slid past with tinkling of bells and the clatter of horses' hoofs on the asphalt.

Again he thought he heard something . . . it must have been imagination. . . .

All the same, Baroche was a nice boy, a very nice boy, and they lived under the tiles . . . it was not of much consequence. But the Lourtys and that female Dutoit. . . . The Lourtys who were perpetually hard up and whose creditors wore out the new stair carpet with their constant coming and going . . . as if that sneaky-looking little boy with his muddy boots did not see to that, as it was! . . .

and Lourtys himself who was really insane—insane about women!

He was a match for the Lourtys though, the doctor was on his side. . . . But that Dutoit woman, there was a devil in that lame body . . . she was one too many for him . . . one might take her down a peg or two just for a moment, by alluding to her irregular life . . . but it was a funny thing, even about that he dared not say much. There was something in her eyes . . . and she went about in her red clothes as if she were the most respectable person in the world. . . .

Carpentier was beginning to get strangely excited after his summer afternoon nap. That house, his house over which he must watch and keep guard; things must go as he wished after all, and that Dutoit woman would have to cave in.

A house with thirteen "apartments" and another four single rooms, a house with thirty-two occupants, for whose peace and safety he was responsible . . . he and his wife; it was up to him to see that there was no brawling, no night scandals, no nasty smells on the stairs, that no one was annoyed . . . sometimes he felt like a commissioner of police over a whole town.

Occasionally when he lay awake at nights and thought long on this matter he would be subject to the most extraordinary delusions; he would like to have keys to all the apartments, to be able to steal in unexpectedly and secretly, to spy round, criticize, pry into all the cupboards, hunt through all the papers. He would like to belong to a sort of Russian secret service, which would enable him to question every one, demand an explanation as to every one's movements, ask a man why he was there at all, and why the door was locked in broad daylight. It amounted sometimes to a sudden fierce longing, a passion of cruel curiosity and despotic meddlesomeness.

But usually just attending to his official duties would give him the delightful sense of flattered vanity and the consciousness of his own importance.

He, Emile Carpentier, who when he got married was a poor devil who could scarcely provide for his family, and had to send his wife out to work with a bread-cart, and as a charwoman, was now a distinguished person. He was in a position to allow such and such a thing and forbid another; he could find fault with a doctor or a senator if need be. Could he not even give notice to such people as did not please him? Of course the landlord had the final say in the matter, but who but himself could supply the information? And when every quarter the rents were due, all the tenants, including the senator himself, came to him in the loge, and with the bulky porter's books beside him, he would write out the receipts for hundreds of francs very accurately and with much detail.

These were changed days for Hortense too . . . for how many long years had she not driven her baker's cart through the Marais quarter in the early morning in the rain and fog when it was scarcely light; how she had tramped up the stairs in her worn-out slippers, when every one was still in bed, to put the bread outside the doors. . . . Now she filled the place of mentor to every one in the house and any one who had anything to do with it. In the early morning she was in the habit of working for an hour on the stairs and the pavement, but in the day-time she would wander about the house like a well-dressed lady . . . and in spite of her fifty years his wife did credit to her clothes. . . . The ladies in the house came and called on her in the loge, and often they would chat with her through the little window, although they had no questions to ask.

Carpentier dreamed on.

The key was turned in the front door, the door was closed again gently. Two small quiet black figures, dressed alike

and of the same size, stole almost secretly through the hall . . . it must be half-past six; they were the little milliners from the Rue des Piramides, who always came home at this hour—two good well-behaved girls who occupied one room on the fifth floor. . . . Hortense called them “the little ghosts” because they were always dressed in black.

A moment later, a quiet little old lady passed the door of the loge . . . Mademoiselle Villetard. . . . She came back for a moment and a small hand in a black kid glove went up to the door knob, whilst she peeped inside; then as she saw that Madame Carpentier was not there, she smiled and nodded in a friendly way but a trifle shy, and then disappeared again.

Carpentier settled down comfortably once more in his arm-chair.

“Voilà les quatz’arts,
Voilà les quatz’arts,
Voilà les quatz’arts qui passent.”

Very clearly the song rose up from the garden. “Nom de nom de nom.” Carpentier swore. He rose angrily . . . then considered the situation. Ought he to go downstairs? . . . ought he to stop it . . . ?

The singing ceased.

But a moment later it burst forth again, louder than ever:

“Nous émerdons Bérenger . . .”

“Sacré nom,” Carpentier muttered under his breath . . . he clenched his fists, the blood rushed to his head.

“Voilà les quatz’arts passés.”

And just at the moment when Madame Carpentier, hot and perspiring after her outing, reached the loge, Made-

moiselle Lefournier, tall and distinguished, and dressed in mourning, sailed down the stairs and appeared in the hall; after a cool slight bow she remarked, turning round:

"I had expected some people to call this afternoon; it is fortunate they did not come; the party in the garden would certainly have annoyed us. . . ."

Carpentier and his wife both blushed in spite of their redness. He looked beyond the speaker with his one good eye which was now quite wide open; the expression on her face was somewhat insolent although she was obviously making an effort to be pleasant.

"We shall take steps," her husband said.

"Thank you," said Mademoiselle Lefournier, and she left the house with an affable and condescending bow.

"I warned you, Emile!" Madame Carpentier said, trying to pick a quarrel. She was tired, and with great difficulty she was peeling her black cotton gloves off her hot hands.

Carpentier shrugged his shoulders nervously several times . . . he would go down at once if they started again . . . at once . . . this must stop immediately.

But instead of the singing, he heard Aristide and Jozette run up the basement steps and go upstairs . . . the sound of Célestin's clear whistle floated up from the garden . . . but he could not possibly say anything to that after all that had happened.

"What are you going to do, Emile?" Madame Carpentier demanded, still in a quarrelsome frame of mind.

Then, when Louis, the boarder, came to the door, and seeing there were no preparations as yet for the evening meal, disappeared again, Madame Carpentier got up and took her pots and pans from the pantry to heat them.

Carpentier looked out of the window. A concierge's life was not an easy one. . . .

When, however, a quarter of an hour later, the two artists and the girl passed through the hall on their way

out to dinner, Carpentier was at his post at the open loge door; and whilst his unmanageable eyelid trembled foolishly over the blind pupil, he said with becoming severity:

"I am sorry . . . but the gentlemen will understand . . . there have been complaints about the noise in the garden . . . so I can only allow the gentlemen to make use of the garden in the future. . . ."

After this speech he retired hastily behind the loge door.

II

It looked as if the meal at the "Gargote" in the Rue Delambre, where the three always dined, was going to be a disappointing one.

"Sale boîte," Jozette said venomously under her breath, as they walked side by side under the still acacias, along the Boulevard Montparnasse, which was deserted during the dinner hour.

Neither Aristide nor Célestin answered.

The silence was becoming oppressive and stimulated their pent-up anger.

Célestin walked along, gesticulating wildly, as if he wished to settle a violent argument with one peremptory sentence—but in the excitement of their festive garden mood, he had promised to stand them an extra course, and so he began to discourse volubly on the subject.

"Surely one couldn't allow a crétin of a hall-porter to thwart one's plans . . . he had promised them a treat and he would give them a treat . . . what did they think? . . . they were artists after all . . . and surely a sale bourgeois could not insult them? des artistes . . . alors quoi . . . ?"

And he rattled on about their being artists and gave vent to all his socialistic theories in the process, whistling defiantly along the quiet peaceful boulevard.

But Aristide walked on, proud and serious, as if he

thought his feet too good for the asphalt on which they touched. The angry indignation on Jozette's little face, which looked even thinner now, had given place to a quiet sadness.

After that, Célestin's boisterous mood died down suddenly and no one spoke till they reached the door of the restaurant.

It was a long narrow room with mirrors set in dirty white panels edged with gold. At the end of the room where the double row of tables narrowed into one, the two artists and the girl were accustomed to sit at the last table under a mirror.

Jozette, almost mechanically, got out her little powder-box, dusted her cheeks and neck lightly; arranged her pink blouse and tidied her hair under the broad-brimmed white hat.

"I have taken a great deal of trouble to keep your places for you," snapped the skinny little waitress as she handed them their napkins.

She was annoyed that no one had said good evening to her, took their orders for soup and wine with a bored face, and stood chatting at two other tables before shouting her sulky "three perles de Japon" through the hatch at the kitchen steps.

The three waited gloomily.

Aristide pulled at the collar of his linen jacket and fidgeted impatiently. And yet it was not particularly warm in the room, which was ventilated by a gentle draught coming down through the numerous open glass shutters in the white and gold painted ceiling.

"Sale boîte," Jozette said again after they had swallowed their first mouthful of soup, but this time there was a good deal of spite in her voice.

"Yes, we have been stupid," Aristide gave as his opinion, but he said it philosophically, as he was enjoying the "perles

de Japon." At his airy tone, however, Célestin and Jozette, whose faces had softened for a moment, grew gloomy again.

Then—what a relief!—came the large savoury dish of "veau Marengo," the speciality of the little restaurant, which the fat Adelaide herself placed in front of Célestin with a gesture of pride.

Célestin became very active; he sniffed the appetizing smell, stirred the spoon in the dish and fished up the tender bits of fried veal with the snow-white crisp bones, and the smooth grey shiny pieces of mushroom out of the velvety shadows of the sauce.

Jozette smiled, looked a little more cheerful than she felt, to please him; Aristide helped himself liberally.

"I did not sing loudest, did I, Jozette?" Célestin said presently, softened by the pleasant enjoyment of the meal.

"But no . . . no . . . both of you . . . and I also. . . ."

"You yourself sang loudest in the end," said Aristide aggressively.

They went on eating in silence. They shared the remains which Célestin had left in the dish and then wiped the gravy off their plates with bread.

"And you shouted tralalala," Aristide justified himself again as they were waiting at the empty table whilst the maid-of-all-work went for more plates.

An angry wrinkle appeared between Jozette's delicate eyebrows; when Aristide tried to speak again with calm argumentative gesticulations, she suddenly gave vent to her pent-up anger and began to talk hurriedly, without pausing for breath.

"I am not going to stop upstairs again in the afternoons . . . I am going out . . . I am going to the Luxembourg. . . ."

Aristide straightened himself in his chair; he sat very erect and stiff and his thin nose stood out sharply between

his always pale cheeks which looked almost sunken now.

"Jozette," Célestin implored.

He thought Aristide was in the wrong with his jealous order, but, after all, she had promised . . . and where would it all end if she started in this way? . . .

He looked from one strange disconcerted face to the other, quite frightened; he remembered how, not thirty yards from their house, Thierry would be working at his great canvas for many weeks; all sorts of wild ideas came into his head—he imagined the most terrible consequences . . . a lover's quarrel, a duel. . . .

"Come now, Jozette," he said soothingly, full of anxiety. But Jozette was not even listening to him.

"I am going to Luxembourg!" she said again with cold obstinacy, clenching her right fist.

"What? . . . what? . . ." Aristide asked, stammering as if he were light-headed.

"To the Luxembourg!"

"You wouldn't do that . . . you wouldn't do that!"

"Si, si," she hissed angrily.

The Russian, a pale dark boy, dining at the table in front of theirs, looked up, scenting a quarrel, but his questioning eyes showed that he had not understood their rapid French.

Célestin crumbled his bread on his napkin; he looked purple and two swollen blue veins appeared upon his clammy forehead.

Jozette thumped her much-ringed little hands straight in front of her on the table with great decision and began to tap nervously with her slightly work-worn fingers; her white embittered face looking like a small stern mask, surrounded by black bands of hair.

"Listen," Célestin began, trying to patch up the quarrel, "she shouted after that idiot Gros, because the old woman had insulted her about the cat . . . the house started against her, not she against the house."

"You are not going, Jozette, I forbid it," Aristide threatened again. The blood rushed wildly to his face, his steely blue eyes flamed.

Jozette, who was still tapping on the table, looked at him and stopped.

It was not the little waitress, but the fat proprietress herself who brought the plates this time; she was noticeably slow about giving them their knives and forks, whilst her watery grey eyes kept on peering from Aristide to Jozette.

"Sacré vache," Célestin growled, when finally her broad bulging white apron had rolled away between the tables and the wall.

"If you dare . . . if you dare," Aristide snarled at Jozette. Then, as if that short moment of vehemence had broken his strength, he suddenly became deadly white and bent his head low; his arms were supported on the table and he laughed faintly as if he were at his wits' end.

"Aristide . . ." said Jozette softly. She knew these sudden transitions from passion to dismay; she glanced at Célestin.

"Oui, oui . . . let us go to the Luxembourg . . ." said Aristide with gentle but tragic resignation . . . a far-away look in his wide-open eyes, he spoke pathetically with a tearful laughing voice. He would paint rubbish in the Luxembourg . . . he never wanted to sit in the garden again . . . he didn't want to work for Roubaix, either. . . .

"Aristide," Jozette urged again, and she laid her hand on his.

He closed his eyes for a moment, gazed in front of him sadly and sentimentally . . . tears trembled on the edge of his eyelashes. . . .

Threading her way through the people who at the same time were rising from some of the tables, Adelaide appeared with her "épinards au jambon"; she was so busy making

eyes at Aristide that she almost upset the dish against the edge of Célestin's plate.

They did not notice it and looked vaguely at the food without touching it.

One by one the gas-jets at the other end of the room flared up; it made things look more festive, and in the brighter light, the little piles of smooth juicy spinach glowed on the three tender pink white-rimmed slices of ham.

"Are we not going to eat this?" Aristide inquired at last, still languid and to all appearances indifferent.

Jozette took the empty plates and gave them each a helping; she was motherly and sweet, but her little face still looked sad.

"Allons, Bibi . . ." she said as she stroked his cheek and beard with great tenderness.

Célestin crumbled the rest of his bread on to his plate on which he had not started. But Aristide was recovering; he ate with his hand in Jozette's, sighed deeply several times and poured himself out another glass of wine and water.

"Perhaps the heat won't last," Jozette said to cheer herself up; "I shall try again. . . ."

"If you keep calm and don't worry about anything, you can put up with a lot," she remarked a little later.

Then she scraped up the rest of the vegetables for Aristide: "épinards au jambon" was his favourite dish.

Adelaide, who had noticed their faces brighten up, sent the little skivvy to take the orders for dessert. They considered the matter most seriously, as they did every day.

"Finished," said the minx, a malicious look appearing on her pert little face, when they had decided on strawberries.

Then Jozette chose a "Crème de marron," Aristide a "baba au rhum," and Célestin allowed the little waitress, who had now recovered her spirits, to tempt him with a "bonne compote de pruneaux." . . .

"We shall get through our hard times, Bibi," said Jozette,

full of her o'd pluck, while Célestin tried to open the pot of cream with his penknife.

Aristide ate his large cool "baba" very slowly, revelling in each spoonful; when he had half-finished it, he waited a moment, and looked at Jozette . . . his languishing, violet eyes gazed dreamily into her deep, dark soft ones, which never ceased caressing him.

Célestin ate his pruneaux hastily; while he was still sucking the last plum-stone, he made elaborate calculations on a scrap of paper, and the result was that he had to pay ninety centimes more than the others.

He counted out the money on the table, and put down a few extra sous in addition to the usual tip.

Jozette, standing at the looking-glass, powdered her face with the utmost zeal.

"I always knew you were an angel," said Aristide. Their arms firmly interlaced, Célestin following joyfully behind, they walked out of the restaurant in order to go and drink their black coffee at d'Harcourt's on the Boul' Mich'.

CHAPTER 3

I

MADAME JEANNE BONNEAU was the servant at No. 118.

There was also Mademoiselle Lefournier's Julie, and old Antoinette, who had for a great many years looked after Monsieur Levêque and the daily help of the German professor's wife: a timid little hunchback could also be seen of a morning, stealing up the stairs to the fifth floor, where she went to help young Madame Giraud; but Jeanne Bonneau was, and had been for a long time, the servant at No. 118.

Every morning, punctually at half-past six, she would enter the hall of the house, dressed in a light drab coat over her cotton everyday blouse and black skirt.

Even at this early hour her placid little face looked like that of a contented and slightly wondering child, somewhat precocious for its ten or twelve years.

Her dark eyes were narrow and slanting, her complexion rather sallow, and she had a small blunt nose with wide nostrils, and very shiny black hair which was combed straight back from her forehead in a solid roll, a helmet of hair round her smooth child's brow. Her mouth and nose and other features had a guileless and more or less unfinished look.

First she went one floor up to Dr. Valency; she carried his latch-key with her.

There was a little square entrance hall with oaken floor and walls covered with Chinese matting and decorated with all sorts of outlandish odds and ends; there was, on the left, a

narrow little kitchen, and on the right, behind a heavy tapestry curtain, there was the door of the narrow bedroom where the doctor slept in his large ebony bed in the rosy shimmer of red hangings and wall-papers.

Opposite the front door, also behind a tapestry curtain—Valency was a native of Algiers, and had filled his small apartment with brilliant wall and floor coverings—was the door of the study, and in the corner of the dark hall a door could be seen leading into the tiny Eastern-looking drawing-room. Every morning she would perform the same little set of duties, like a machine, very quickly: she hung her coat on the peg behind the kitchen door, tied on the apron which was waiting for her, lit the gas, put on the kettle, opened the study; in the middle of her activities she would skip across to the bedroom door: “Seven o’clock, m’sieur!”

And whilst she was dusting the hall with its weapons, trophies, its Chinese masks, its wooden idols, and its Moorish lanterns hanging from the ceiling, or hurried to and fro between the kitchen and the study preparing the bread and coffee for breakfast, Dr. Valency would appear, his bare feet in red slippers, his calves showing out of the white *burnous*, and pass through the study to his dressing-room.

Jeanne could scarcely spare the time to look round and say good morning, in her eagerness to get on with the work. She darted into the bedroom, stripped the bed . . . the tray with the brown earthenware coffee-pot was placed on a corner of the study table, also the earthenware jug of hot milk, the large purple-flowered cup for the *café au lait* with four lumps of sugar in the saucer and a plate with two “croissants.”

By this time it was nearly eight. Jeanne gave one last, hasty, vague flourish with her feather brush round the Eastern drawing-room, hung up her apron on the peg in the kitchen, wrapped herself in her coat and departed.

She climbed three flights up to Madame Lourty’s.

There was less opulence here ; everything was scantier and poorer than at the doctor's, but it was also lighter and more pleasant. Here there were cheap mats on the floor, no heavy curtains, and there was an array of the simplest furniture along the walls. Yet it all looked cozy and was in app'e-pie order, showing the touch of a woman's hand, and each of the few ornaments seemed to radiate a sort of intimate friendliness and special charm.

Jeanne loved coming here ; here she felt at home.

Her face which, during her hurried activities at Dr. Valency's, had assumed the expression of a careworn old pug, regained its usual look of child-like wondering cheerfulness when Madame Lourty's soft sing-songy "Bonjour, Jeanne," reached her from the kitchen or the room.

Jeanne would have gone through fire and water for little Madame Lourty. She rushed through her work at the doctor's so as to be able to go upstairs two minutes earlier, and each of these minutes seemed pure gain. And yet, this was not a paying job, nor an attractive one. Madame Lourty could not afford high wages. Madame Lourty cooked herself, worked herself, even polished the floors of her rooms herself ; Jeanne came to wash dishes, scrub out the pans, clean the bowls. The dirtiest work was left for the servant who came for one hour in the day. But in that one hour Madame Lourty showed an affection for Jeanne that was almost like the intimate confidence of a good friend, and Jeanne accepted the friendship and returned it full of joy and respectful diffidence : she had for Madame Lourty a blind and glowing attachment, which resembled that of a faithful family retainer.

Jeanne loved the most trifling objects in Madame Lourty's house with a special unconscious tenderness. She showed respect for Monsieur Lourty in her actions and even in her thoughts as Madame Lourty's husband. She found excuses for him, forgave him, defended him, just as Madame did ;

she helped to spoil the tiresome Etienne, who was already spoilt by his father: he was Madame's son. . . .

Jeanne was tenderly, almost pathetically, devoted to the photograph of Monsieur and Madame as bride and bridegroom, which hung in the bedroom; to the corner in the drawing-room where Madame's little sofa and work-table stood; to the table-cover which she had embroidered herself, and to the big green cockatoo which lived at the dining-room window in a dome-shaped cage, supported by a wicker pedestal.

Every morning this cockatoo was the subject of an intermittent flow of childish conversation, very soft, so as not to waken Monsieur, who was still asleep.

"Has Coco said 'Good morning' to you yet, Jeanne?"

"No, Madame . . . he is lazy . . . he is still asleep like Monsieur. . . ."

"He had another bath yesterday, Jeanne."

"Madame spoils Coco."

"And would Coco like some of the nice chick-weed which Jeanne has brought?"

"Yesterday when Madame was out, he screamed until he heard Madame on the stairs."

And so while their rapid feet hurried noiselessly across the rooms and their quick hands did the work as if by magic, the quiet, pleasant chatter rippled on.

"Bonjour, Charlotte . . . bonjour, Charlotte . . ." Jeanne would then say in a whisper through her nose, trying to imitate the animal till it jumped from its perch, with its smooth, green and black tail in the air, its head buried in the sand in the corner of its cage and shouted back its hoarse nasal "Bonjour, Charlotte . . . bonjour, Charlotte. . . ."

This "bonjour Charlotte" was the only thing which the not very intelligent bird could remember. They used to call him Charlotte sometimes, but Jeanne did this very softly and shyly, as if she were doing something naughty, because it

was also Madame's name. And every morning Jeanne found a spare moment to give Coco his lump of sugar and to put her short fat little forefinger through the bars of his cage, and as the bird put out its head longingly, to scratch the soft curly down and the white fibrous feathers underneath. Sometimes, as she went on with her work and the bird, in an unusually quiet mood, stood without moving on the perch of its cage, with its philosophic beak, and its round eyes gazing into space, Jeanne would let him hop on to her finger, balancing him carefully, bring him through the wire door and place him on her shoulder. Then as she felt his softly breathing body against her neck, the fine bright-green head with its sharply curved beak against her cheek, he would dive away, spreading his drooping tail like an exquisite fan over her back, and hook his claws firmly into the stuff of her blouse, so as not to lose his balance, whilst she moved about doing her work. And, suddenly unfolding his pointed wings, so that the whitish-green down at the side became visible, he would fly up and settle on her head like an emerald marvel, nestling against her shiny black hair.

"Bonjour, Charlotte . . . bonjour, Charlotte. . . ." Jeanne encouraged him in a quiet ecstasy, feeling the swaying bird on her motionless head; and the bird, his wings trembling in his efforts not to fall, burying his head in the thick black masses of her hair, began to shout back his terrified stuttering and stifled "Bonjour, Charlotte . . ." more foolish and hoarse than ever.

Then, childishly amused, the two women would laugh out loud . . . but they were both startled, and motioned to each other to be quiet. . . . The bird's cries never seemed to disturb the sleeper. Only after Etienne, who had come to breakfast in the nick of time, in a great hurry and very noisily, had rushed off, after much hunting for his school books and banging of doors, there were sounds in the bed-

room; the splashing of a sponge and the clatter of running water in the wash-basin could be heard: Monsieur Lourty was undergoing a water cure, and was therefore allowed under doctor's orders not to arrive at his office till ten o'clock. A little later, after a lengthy interval of rubbing, there was quiet once more: Monsieur was resting.

The bird, put back in his cage, had, during the sudden noise, scratched round his cage like mad; then after Etienne had departed he calmed down and sat perfectly still, his head well forward, listening to the regular sounds in the other room. Finally he started his plaintive cry again.

It was in their innocent love for the parrot that the really well-educated little woman, Madame Lourty and the primitive creature, Jeanne Bonneau, who could scarcely read or write, found a bond in an always accessible field of natural and mutual sentiment.

Madame Lourty was a French-Swiss by birth. She had been to good schools in Geneva, knew two foreign languages, had studied drawing, music and botany. Her early marriage had brought her almost every possible disappointment, so that her soul had come to love life's small sweetnesses, and had learnt to find happiness in them. Her fair, pale and careworn little face was nearly always radiant with a certain inner peace and serenity.

Jeanne came from a fishing village on the coast of Brittany. When she was sixteen, she had come in her national costume, only knowing a few words of French, as assistant nurse to the semi-secular Hôpital de la Miséricorde de Marie, which was staffed by Breton sisters. Here, surrounded by thick walls of the hospital and its garden, which she never left, this shy, rather rough, but withal, gentle, child of Nature had accustomed herself to the quaint serenity of the naïve world of nuns in which she lived.

She had become particularly attached to one of the patients, an English girl who was married shortly after and went to live outside of Paris.

Jeanne followed her as maid, nursed the delicate little woman during her confinements, devoted herself to the care of her four children who were born in quick succession.

Then, when she was twenty-seven she got married herself to a boy from Artois, a good-looking fellow who was a salesman in the General Markets in Paris. This was five years ago.

She was very proud of Robert's handsome face and his fine figure; she liked to boast of him to the people whom she knew, but she had never been violently in love with him. Passion was not in her nature, and she endured his as one of the many duties of her new estate. There were no children.

Every morning at four o'clock Robert had to leave the house; he returned at seven in the evening, had a meal, and went to sleep. He stayed at home on Sundays and rested all day from the labours of the week, talking but little, enjoying the dainty dishes which Jeanne prepared for him. Sometimes on fine summer days, they would spend an afternoon in the country: that was the treat of her life.

"We go for a walk . . . arm in arm. . . . We lie down in the grass . . . Robert sleeps . . . I look about me. . . . Then we go and have a drink . . . then we return. . . ." So she often told Madame Lourty.

Robert earned good wages at his work in the Markets, but his midday meal, eaten away from home, his continual associating with his friends in the public-houses of the Rue Coquilliers, swallowed up most of it. Jeanne considered this quite fair; a man must not be dull, a man must take what is his due; and she worked contentedly all day long to supplement the household funds.

As though from an inborn tradition, she had unconsciously formulated for herself a marriage code, according to which

her life had been regulated once and for all, and Robert did not do badly with it.

Madame Lourty and Jeanne had much in common; both were quiet and introspective; the one thoughtful, the other dreamy; both of a placid and cheerful disposition. They understood each other's little habits, dislikes and disappointments, all each other's small excitements and joys. Madame Lourty liked to think of Jeanne's primevally simple instinctive feeling for her husband; Jeanne admired Madame Lourty in her never-ceasing large-minded kindness for Monsieur, in her never-failing care for Etienne. Madame Lourty had not once by one single hint or complaint let Jeanne into the secret of the great sorrows and difficulties of her life; but Jeanne, with the amazingly strong intuition which was characteristic of her when fond of any one, had guessed everything, understood everything, before she had been a month in Madame Lourty's service. She, in her turn, had never made an indiscreet allusion, yet Madame Lourty had felt from the beginning that Jeanne knew all; and the little woman, usually so proudly reserved and ashamed of her misfortune, had suffered this intrusion into her life as something almost natural, and without any aversion; she had even accepted it as a secret mutual understanding, about which not a word was spoken, but which, all the same, comforted her.

Very occasionally, at particularly difficult times, it had occurred to her that one or other of them had said something which in its crudeness would have given any one else a fright; they, however, were so thoroughly permeated with this beautiful mutual confidence, that the wonder of these sudden utterances could only affect them very vaguely and almost pleasantly.

Jeanne would inquire so tactfully about the small daily worries which were caused by the one big one, that Madame Lourty never found it hard to answer.

"No . . . yesterday Monsieur was not so well . . . he had not wished to go to his office . . . she had gone herself to the *Hôtel de ville* to say that he was ill. . . ."

"Were they unfriendly to Madame?"

"They were not rude, but certainly not encouraging." She did not mention her fear that sooner or later Lourty would get dismissed; but Jeanne knew this fear as well as if they had spoken about it.

"Had Dr. Besnard been again?"

"Yes, and he had prescribed another soothing medicine." When the ever-pressing financial difficulties in which Madame Lourty found herself were brought to light by the non-payment of a bill or the refusal of a proffered receipt it seemed to Jeanne as if the most painful spot in a wound were being roughly touched, and yet it was she who often found the word in season which would keep up appearances for the mistress towards the maid.

There was only one thing about which Madame Lourty complained when she was overwrought: this was the Carpentiers' continual nagging.

Yesterday Madame Carpentier had snubbed her again because she had shaken the bed-clothes out of the window at five minutes to ten . . . as if she did not know perfectly well that her husband was ill, that he must rest and that she could not call him any earlier . . . how could it have annoyed anybody? Another day Carpentier had rung her door bell impudently; it appeared that Monsieur Etienne had made disgracefully dirty footmarks on the newly dusted stair-carpet. . . . Etienne had not been farther than the dairy next door, Etienne could not possibly have had dirty boots.

These tales filled Jeanne with a bitter resentment against the people in the loge and she gave vent to her feelings in short comments none the less cutting for being suppressed; sometimes when she was already greatly worried about

Madame Lourty, a trifle like this would be the last straw. Her eyes on these occasions would look so helpless and sad that the little woman, full of regret for her weakness, would cheer up again in order to comfort her. She would then have recourse to Charlotte, and would take the bird out of his cage. . . . "Bonjour, Jeanne . . . bonjour, Jeanne . . ." she tried to say in the beast's foolish nasal cry. Coco, delighted to be free, jumped about on the outstretched finger which held him, then flew . . . two flaps of his wings landed him in the curve of Jeanne's neck, where he spread the lovely bright green glory of a tremulous half-unfolded wing against the black shiny hair on her neck and her pale full child's jaw. . . .

"Bonjour, Cha-lotte . . . bonjour, Cha . . . lotte . . ." screeched the cockatoo. Unwittingly his cries comforted the two women, who laughed.

II

At nine o'clock Jeanne was due at Madame Dutoit's, her most stylish place, at nine o'clock sharp!

She would sometimes risk slipping away from the doctor's flat a bit before the time; sometimes she cheated him of as much as ten minutes or a quarter of an hour—nothing in the world would have made her arrive at Madame Dutoit's a second too late, not even for the sake of Madame Lourty. A minute or so before nine she would drop the extra work for which she always found time, and every morning with the same regrets that this most precious hour of the day was past, she hung her apron on the kitchen door, put on her coat and remained with her hand on the front door until she heard the gentle sing-songy "Bonjour, Jeanne" in answer to her good-bye. Then in a great hurry she descended the two flights of stairs.

As soon as the front-door bell, which Madame Dutoit had

had fixed at her own expense, had rung, the expression of Jeanne's face began to change. Suspicious wrinkles appeared on her forehead, two rather terrified lines appeared on either side of her tightly closed mouth. Now and again Monsieur Herz opened the door; that was a relief. Herz, a good-natured little Jew not very Jewish in appearance, with kind sensible eyes in his somewhat expressionless face, turned away immediately, and going to his desk in the dining-room went on making up his books and Jeanne would quietly set to work. But usually Madame Dutoit herself appeared upon the scene; she looked straight at Jeanne with her sharp eyes as if she were sizing her up . . . glanced at her watch with an impressive gesture . . . gave some fresh order with regard to the work; her slight lameness making her seem particularly aggressive, she marched through the little hall to the shop door, gave another order, went in, left the door open, so that Jeanne became uneasy and always imagined that she felt those fierce brown eyes on everything which her suddenly clumsy hands tried to do.

Always dressed in a red blouse or dressing-gown, Madame Dutoit sat installed at the window in her huge office chair at a large bureau, surrounded by the four walls lined with large white boxes, and speaking from there in her customary self-confident intense manner, she would sometimes attack Jeanne with questions such as:

"Jeanne, do you know what an atheist is?" or "Jeanne, what does *labor omnia vincit* mean?" or "Jeanne, why is confession so immoral?"

These attacks of questions for which she was always prepared and which, nevertheless, took her by surprise, were a daily torture to the simple-minded Jeanne Bonneau.

Madame Germaine Dutoit whose strong head was crammed with paradoxes, full of an odd assortment of learning and anticlerical subtleties with which she puzzled even

the priests who came to buy hats—Madame Dutoit was to Jeanne a wonderful being who knew everything, who inspired her with boundless awe and a sort of mysterious fear. Much as she loved Madame Lourty, she was firmly convinced that as far as cleverness was concerned, Madame Dutoit was an easy first. Jeanne regarded all the incomprehensible and weird things which Madame Dutoit told her as the highest form of wisdom and truth, but she rarely spoke of it to Madame Lourty. She believed that Madame Dutoit saw ghosts, that there were people on the planet Mars, and that the story of the creation was a myth; she believed the most eccentric tales of Cagliostro's magic art, that there had been female popes and that all priests had mistresses. All these ideas were firmly rooted, and at the same time very vague, so vague that she would have had great difficulty in repeating them, and it made no difference to her habits; at Easter time she went just the same to St. Etienne du Mont for her little consecrated palm-branch—she believed that this safeguarded the house from fire—and when Madame Dutoit touched on any of the subjects which affected her code of life, then she would speak out bravely: no, she did not know for whom her husband would vote; Robert said that that was not a woman's affair, and Robert was quite right; no, Robert never told her how much money he earned and how much he spent . . . surely a man was not obliged to do this . . . she was comfortably off, what more could she desire?

Jeanne was very sensitive towards Madame Dutoit about her want of learning; she had never learned how to speak pure French, she had some difficulty in reading print, and she could hardly read writing at all.

Madame Dutoit considered it her duty to improve this, but Jeanne, with the cunning which in some ways she possessed, always managed to conceal the extent of her ignorance, so that the two of them were engaged in a

perpetual game of hide-and-seek, which for Madame Dutoit was full of attraction, but which worried Jeanne considerably.

Robert was in the habit of writing down the housekeeping accounts and Jeanne learned them by heart, so that running her finger along the words, she could read them; but when Madame Dutoit called upon her for an immediate account, she had to think of all sorts of excuses, so as to avoid writing anything down. Her latest subterfuge was a kind of slow clever pretence at misunderstanding which quite baffled Madame Dutoit's quick intellect.

Apart from the shop, there were in this apartment only a bedroom and a dining-room, but this dining-room, the contents of which were the outcome of M. Herz's passion for collecting, was so dusty and overcrowded, that even a clearer brain than Jeanne possessed would not have been able to establish order there. M. Herz collected china, crystal and missiles; Madame Dutoit's untidy library consisted of old volumes which she bought in the little shops along the Seine, books about spiritualism, about fortune-telling and phrenology, about astronomy, books of travel, old botanical volumes and little books about European court scandals, novels by Jules Verne and Erckmann-Chatrian, Lavater's "Physiognomie" and also bundles of pamphlets referring to Chemist's specialities.

And Jeanne bustled about shyly between that dining-room and the kitchen, tightly packed with dusty rubbish, tidying something here, cleaning something there, without any definite plan or clear idea as to what she was trying to do.

The appearance of this establishment prevented her from seeing clearly; now and again as if suddenly roused she would attempt to work as systematically and tidily at the Dutoit's as she did at Madame Lourty's, just as in a rare fit of absentmindedness she might start muddling at Madame Lourty's in the Dutoit style. But these mistakes did not

occur often. Madame Dutoit and Madame Lourty were to her mind like two worlds apart, so that she herself was a different individual in each of them.

At about eleven o'clock she started preparing dinner. She did this without hurrying and very carefully she set the table, waited on Madame Dutoit who dined alone on five days out of the seven, when M. Herz was away attending to his wine business. She ate a little herself in the intervals of stirring one pan and scouring another, clearing away the things, washed up the dishes, dusted a little more, dusted the shop, gave all the boxes another flick with her feather brush.

She was never allowed to touch the bedroom: Madame Dutoit cleaned that herself . . . "because she is ashamed of her relations with Monsieur Herz," Monsieur Carpentier had once said when he was still friends with Jeanne, but Jeanne with her innate loyalty had protested against this: "It is not true, Monsieur Herz sleeps in the little room behind the dining-room": and this fiction was always kept up, Monsieur Herz was the lodger. . . . In the midst of her meaningless and haphazard working, it was a relief to her to go down every morning first to do the shopping in the neighbourhood, and a little later to the garden to feed the hens. Carrying the red earthenware dish with potatoes or rice under her arm, the small bowl with golden barley-corn in her hand, she went down three flights of stairs, filled with childish delight when the Dutoit's door closed behind her.

She made her way through the wicket-gate, past the glittering ball, then she went through the little door to the pergola . . . the hens came fluttering round her from underneath and off the table, from the flower-pots and out of the hen-house and her small brown hand scattered the grain to the greedy chickens in tiny quantities so as to prolong the pleasures.

She emptied the contents of the earthenware dish into a corner, locked the hen-coop carefully, picked a few withered

flowers and leaves from amongst the stocks and went upstairs. In passing, according to agreement, she went into the doctor's to make his bed and tidy the washstand, and on the few occasions when Valency was at home, he would always come and hang around her for a minute and ask with a scarcely noticeable smile of concealed amusement on his sarcastic face:

"And what did Madame Dutoit say to-day?" . . .

He asked this ever since the fatal day when Jeanne had happened to say that there was no heaven and no God either because Madame Dutoit had said so . . . the little doctor had roared with laughter on this occasion so that for a long time Jeanne was particularly careful about what she said . . . but in the long run she was taken in by the serious manner in which he always asked this question, and sometimes whilst she was still dumbfounded by a newly heard tale, it was a necessity to her to unburden her mind . . . and then Valency would add another anecdote about Madame Dutoit and her maid to his repertoire. Moreover it was the ever-recurring question itself which made the little doctor chuckle. And quite often Madame Dutoit, as soon as Jeanne came upstairs, would ask in her most haughty and scornful manner: "And this Monsieur Valency . . . who does he think he is?" . . .

Jeanne always rejoiced when on coming back she found the shop door closed, and behind it Madame Dutoit's voice could be heard, sharply persuasive: "Stiff felt, Monsieur l'Abbé? . . . the brim not too much turned up . . . this will suit you . . . try it on, M'sieur l'Abbé, there in front of the glass." . . . The days on which Madame Dutoit's business flourished, when twenty times during the morning Jeanne was obliged to rush out of the kitchen or room to show priests and fathers in and out, were the most restful for her. The subdued sound of the tap-tap of the stick on the polished floor could be heard from behind the closed

door, and quieter and lower, interrupting the excited woman's voice, a man spoke every now and then—"Undoubtedly, madame . . . undoubtedly—all the same. . . ."

Jeanne, thoroughly happy when left to work by herself, sometimes could not resist the temptation to help herself to a lump of sugar from the basin; and if there were a bottle of "mare" or liqueur on the sideboard, she, with her Breton taste for spirits, occasionally took a hurried little sip.

Until late in the afternoon, Madame Dutoit walked about among her box-covered walls, with hasty jerks trotting up one little ladder and down another . . . she had taken out hundreds in her careless zeal, which were still lying about, all kinds and numbers mixed up on the floor and counter and chairs; piles of hats which had to be sorted, brushed and put away. And her head still full of long arguments and ideas, attacks and counter-attacks which followed the inevitable dispute with one of her customers, she bustled about, reading the labels aloud and hunting for the box which belonged to each hat . . . cashmere b.g. 57. beaver c.r. 57, beaver c.r. 55 . . . that was all Jeanne could hear in her kitchen.

III

At three o'clock, Jeanne had finished at Madame Dutoit's. One odd day she used to go straight home to attend to her own things, but she stayed as often as she could in order to make a little extra money.

So she divided her afternoon between the senator and Madame Bertin. Madame Bertin was a friend of Madame Dutoit's; their apartments were both on the second floor. Before her marriage with a book-keeper in the Bon Marché she had been a hospital nurse; now she still practised as a cupper and masseuse. During her years in hospital she had collected several stern hygienic principles which she

introduced into the conjugal home, and in the perspective of six years of married life these had developed into hard and fast abstract ideas. She lived in rooms which contained nothing which could possibly collect dust, where there was little furniture and only such as could be cleaned with soap and water; she only ate what she considered to be "hygienic," and the purity of "raw materials" was a subject which she loved discussing with all and sundry. Jeanne had a great admiration for Madame Bertin, not the wide-eyed bewilderment with which Madame Dutoit inspired her, but a quietly appreciative respect; she liked to listen to the instructions which Madame Bertin gave her, seated on the edge of the kitchen table in her snow-white professional apron, her elbow on her knee and her long forefinger supporting her chin. Her grey eyes set in a handsome but rather dull face, her grey hair scraped back from her forehead, she would lecture as if she were teaching a class of young probationers. And though Jeanne had a boundless admiration for Mme. Dutoit's tales, she understood these better, because many of them aroused vague memories of what she had learned in the Hôpital de la Miséricorde de Marie. But she did not tell Madame Bertin this because she knew quite well how much she despised everything connected with "convent fools."

Once she had told Dr. Valency that Madame Bertin considered that any sensible person should have their entire house disinfected at least once a year, and since then, Valency used to vary his sarcastic "Well, what did Madame Dutoit tell you to-day?" with a still more caustic; "And what had Madame Bertin to say for herself yesterday?"

On two afternoons in the week, until the holidays started, Jeanne went to the senator's wife. They always lived exactly as if they had just moved house or were on the point of doing so, never really comfortable. He was a well-to-do landowner from Beauce and had rooms in the Rue

Barral close by the Senate for the four or five months which he had to spend in Paris. The apartment was used almost entirely as a place to sleep in, because of the many friends from the country who often turned up unexpectedly. The rooms contained only absolutely necessary and very simple furniture. Occasionally an antique piece which they had bought at a sale strayed in as if by mistake, waiting to be sent to their country seat at Beauce. Jeanne would have been surprised if any one else had put the lumps of sugar straight out of the bag into the cups, or had laid a bedroom rug in front of the drawing-room sofa, or had put a drawing-room chair in the bedroom, and in case of colds, in order to save the laundry bill, used a table napkin in place of a handkerchief, but the senator was of course an aristocratic man, and the senator's wife a great lady, and she had no doubt that in their "castle" at Beauce everything was very grand and opulent. She did the work which was expected of her without judging or criticizing; she had the true Parisian's respect for a title and for the Legion of Honour.

And when finally five o'clock struck, Jeanne for the last time that day hung her apron on the kitchen door, combed up the fine massive helmet of hair, which now lay in damp loops on her temples. She washed, and brushed her clothes. Her eyes, even smaller now and still more slanting, looked very bright above the wide bluish smudge which seemed to push them up—her face round her rather reddish nose was drawn and rather grey with fatigue; she was now somewhat like a little Chinese woman getting on in years but particularly pleased with life. Wrapped idly in her fawn coat, she trotted swiftly down the stairs, sometimes going down the last two flights into the garden as well to say good-evening to her friend Gabrielle Leguënné—then cheerfully and in good spirits, she made her way to her own abode, consisting of two rooms in the Rue St. Jaques, to cook supper for Robert, whom she expected home about seven.

CHAPTER 4

I

LISTEN . . . !" said Madame Leguënne, raising her thin white forefinger ecstatically, to Jeanne who was standing in the centre of the path, holding the empty dish which had contained the chickens' food "listen . . . he is playing . . . !"

The languishing fawn-like eyes, half-closed, gazed up at an open window of the apartment above her, whence the soft strains of a violin came drifting out into the quiet summer morning. It was the German professor who was playing melancholy tunes of the Fatherland, and now and again, from the recesses of the front room, the gentle voice of a woman hummed the melody.

"It is soul-inspiring . . ." Madame Leguënne sighed, but Jeanne was in a hurry, said "Good-bye, Gabrielle," and went into the house. In deep thought, her head bent, Madame Leguënne walked slowly up the path—the garden was still deserted, for the artists had not come quite so early the last few days . . . then she turned and went through her own gate, and sitting on the low stool under the convolvulus she gazed up and listened. Above her long narrow body, clad in deep claret-colour, and the angular structure of her thinly draped knees, her delicate pale head with its hollow sentimental eyes, looked strange and startling against the shady wall of green foliage and white blossoms.

Then suddenly the music stopped, the kindly face of a man with a glossy upturned moustache and a dark square-cut beard, appeared at the window. . . .

Madame Leguënne made a perplexed startled gesture, then greeted him in her usual manner, her eyes cast down, a pathetic sad smile hovering round her lips. . . . Like a sentimental schoolgirl, she came out of the summer-house, went to the hen-coop, knelt down and stuck a few blades of grass through the wire meshes.

"The guinea-pigs have little ones . . ." said she shyly, looking up at the window from her crouching position.

The man's friendly face seemed to express pleasure at hearing the news.

"I have five just now," she began again . . . "four" . . . she pointed to the hen-coop, "and one . . ." inclining her head towards the room, "my husband . . . five pigs. . . ."

Then she laughed with an equivocal forced gaiety.

The man at the window suddenly disappeared into his room in consternation.

Every one in the house where few of the inmates knew each other—every one knew Madame Leguënne.

Madame Dutoit still confused Madame Gros and Madame Lourty, though they did not resemble each other in any way—only because Jeanne had described them both as small, thin and pale: Monsieur Herz still took the concierge's son for the gentleman of one of the adjoining houses; Monsieur Bertin and Monsieur Giraud, the one a cashier, the other a salesman at the Bon Marché who saw each other daily, but left the house at different hours, discovered only after two years that they lived in the same house; Dr. Valency knew neither Madame Bertin nor Madame Dutoit by sight—he only bowed to Mademoiselle Lefournieur, the one person who had ever called him in; the senator bowed to no one.

But every one knew Madame Leguënne, although perhaps not always by name; and all of them in various degrees of sympathy and dislike were sorry for the woman in the basement.

Every one had seen the lanky creature with her wan face, dressed in her showy purple or red garments in the hall or on the stairs. Every one knew that she was unhappily married, that her husband frequently did not come home and that she was dying of an internal complaint—the mean fellow gave her little more than the rent from his big printer's wage and the poor feeble wretch was forced to keep herself by taking sewing.

And every one helped her in that, from Mademoiselle Lefournier whose underlinen she mended to Madame Gros for whom she had twice turned a morning-dress. For the concierge's wife she made dressing-gowns, for the lodger overalls, Julie gave her blouses to sew, and for the German professor's wife she fashioned wonderful aprons. Jeanne used to come downstairs from her various places with stacks of work.

And now for some time every one knew about the sad adventure which had kept her anxious for many months; she had been discovered by the Custom House authorities in the act of trying to smuggle a few bottles of spirits into Paris; she had been heavily fined and had not paid. She had been summoned to the Town Hall and to the Palais de Justice, she had not gone; the affair was still in the hands of the police . . . it was rumoured that her belongings would certainly be sold up even if nothing worse happened.

No one knew the ins and outs of the story and Mme. Leguënné least of all.

She had stood in the empty Custom House of the Gare de l'Est . . . when suddenly a Custom House official questioned her "nothing to declare?" . . . She had lost her head, he had opened her trunk and when he started burrowing roughly through its contents he heard the rattling of glass among her stockings where she had hidden it and fished out the three miserable half-bottles of brandy which her sister had given her an hour before her departure . . . her

legs had trembled; more men in green uniforms had gathered round; then an old one with silver bands on his hat, had told her to follow him into the office.

"Of course we shall keep this alcohol here!" he said roughly . . . she had tried to excite his pity by looking at him as sweetly as she could.

"A little flask only, monsieur! brewed by my brother himself, I did not know there was any harm, just in a beer bottle. . . ."

But he had lost his temper and told her snappishly to hand him over twenty francs immediately . . . while he issued the warrant. . . . It had given her a terrible fright.

"Twenty francs fine . . . ?" she gasped. "It isn't a fine," he grumbled, "it is only an instalment . . ." then he put on his spectacles and began to write without paying any further attention to her.

"An instalment . . . !" she murmured, at her wit's end. . . . All at once she remembered that she had only two francs in her purse with which to pay her *fiacre* home . . . her brother had advised her not to carry all she possessed with her . . . the five-franc pieces were in the trunk and she had been allowed to lock it up. Almost fainting with secret joy, she had waited, her face more pitiful than ever. . . .

"Address?" asked the man.

"What?" he repeated as he did not understand her. Suddenly he came towards her with a large sheet of paper: "Twenty francs. . . ."

She feigned consternation . . . : "But I haven't got it," I have nothing. I have just enough with me to pay for my cab . . . what else could I do with that heavy trunk? . . . look in my purse. There is hardly two francs all told. . . ."

"Why did you not say that sooner, sacré nom!" he swore; "did you not see that I was writing out a receipt?"

"Well, you can go," he said a little later.

With a plaintive good-bye, and nearly mad with delight, she had shuffled out and when she was leaning back in the cab, her trunk safely on the box in front, and was gliding along between other cabs and trams, she was hardly able to restrain a nervous giggle, so proud was she at having carried off things so well.

But, sure enough, in less than a fortnight a large yellow envelope arrived . . . in it a paper. . . . Director of customs of the City of Paris. . . . Conseil d'Administration . . . procès verbal . . . marchandise saisie . . . the interested party is invited to appear at the Government Office 9, Avenue Victoria. . . . She did not understand a word of it except that she was fined sixty francs.

She shrugged her shoulders . . . sixty francs . . . four francs and a trifle was all she possessed . . . Leguënné had vanished for a few days last week and had given her hardly anything . . . and now a fine of sixty francs . . . indeed! . . . she thought it was rather amusing really! . . . if she had not got it, well then, she hadn't got it . . . she would be a fool to go!

Finally she considered the incident so funny that she showed the paper to every one.

But six weeks later, quite unexpectedly, the summons arrived. Coming home from an afternoon's shopping, she caught sight of Carpentier's face, strangely ominous, at the window of the loge; open, without any envelope, the grim document lay on the table. The Carpentiers had pretended to be very sympathetic, but they had been far from pleased about the affair, and Hortense had told her straight out that they did not care to have people in the house who had dealings with the police, and never before had there been such a person as a bailiff in the loge.

"But what . . . what is that then?" she had stammered.

"What is that?" Carpentier said, dragging her up to the paper and pointing at it with his horny finger. City of

Paris. . . . Plaintiff . . . refusal . . . has not appeared . . . prosecuted . . . police . . . Leguënné did not know anything about the matter, till that fatal afternoon, but in the evening she told him everything in her anxiety. He did not care a damn, he said, it was up to her to find the money, she could earn enough with sewing . . . or otherwise—he was away so often—a month's visit to St. Lazare was not such a bad thing . . . you were given a red velvet boudoir and your food was served in silver dishes which had belonged to Madame de Maintenon.

Tuesday, June 20, drew near, was there . . . she felt the quarter, the half-hours hurry past her ominously . . . she did not go . . . half-past one came, the time stated, she had not gone, it was too late, she could not go now . . . what would happen . . . ?

For days she crouched in her two rooms downstairs, never looked up when she crept along the wall into the garden in her threadbare dressing-gown, scurried timidly through the hall and quickly out of the front door.

One afternoon Jeanne came to her; the senator had come to town the day before. He said, "The woman ought to have gone to the Custom House, in that case the affair might have been ended with a forty- or fifty-franc fine . . . when will the sentence be pronounced?"

The time fixed in the summons had expired four days ago.

The next morning Jeanne hardly dared repeat what the senator had said; it might end in being a fine of hundreds of francs, perhaps more than a thousand. . . .

"And if I do not pay?"

Jeanne did not know.

Silently they stood facing each other in the garden path, Jeanne awkwardly, trying to find a word of comfort and Madame Leguënné with a stupid smile on her face, gazing upwards with dark vacant eyes. . . .

"Go on!" she said at last with a foolish smile, "a thousand francs . . . a poor seamstress . . . do *you* believe it?"

After that morning she had cheered up again—the idea of a fine of a thousand francs she found comical and ridiculous. . . . She became talkative and happy once more, she only thought of St. Lazare in the humorous connexion of the thousand-franc fine . . . it was all nonsense . . . the story of Madame Maintenon and the silver dinner-service seemed more likely.

Jeanne would have found it difficult to explain why she called Madame Leguënne her friend. She much preferred Leguënne himself, whom, in spite of his bad reputation in the house, she did not consider much worse than her husband, whose pal he was. He meant well, but Gabrielle did not know how to make his home comfortable for him.

She was sure if instead of the delicious ragouts, the roast rabbit and the tripe and other delicacies upon which Robert feasted, she had given him the same *pot-au-feu* day after day, he would also tire of it and go and have a square meal at the nearest Marchand de Vin. If you could not pay a servant, it was your duty to learn to cook, even if you had been a lady's companion with a bit of money put by . . . and no man liked to have an ailing wife, and if you were ill, you just had to take care and get better again and never complain. Gabrielle was always complaining.

Jeanne forgave Leguënne much on account of his great love for animals. Every morning when he had spent the night at home, he would go into the high shed which he had built himself, take away the dirt, rinse and fill the water troughs, put down a plateful of potatoes or scatter a few handfuls of corn. He was obviously rather shy of being seen which gave him a furtive appearance, for he knew well that his wife complained about him in the house,

and through all the windows of the lofty housefront he could feel the disapproving glances of the inmates. He would go inside without looking up, a tall gentlemanly figure with slightly stooping shoulders, his head bent so that his skull, almost bald, caught the full daylight.

Gabrielle in her own way was also fond of animals. She was glad that the hens laid eggs which she required on account of her weak digestion. Sometimes when Leguënné stayed away for days at a time, she would catch a young pigeon and roast it for herself, and she would very much have liked to have a healthy cock so as to breed chickens.

Then she would also sit under the convolvulus roof with a guinea-pig in her lap and stroke the yellow and white spotted head with her long delicate bony fingers, whilst her languishing glance swept the house-front, and making little kissing sounds with her lips, she would feed a pigeon from her hand and allow the bird to peck at her pale mouth.

On this particular Saturday morning, when, rather ashamed, she had seen the German Professor start away from the window, she wandered round the hen-coop somewhat aimlessly, picking up a few bits of paper which had blown on to her one and only patch of grass, threw them into the next garden, picked one or two faded husks from the convolvulus hedge—then suddenly heard an insistent knocking on her basement door.

In the hall she found a man dressed in a black alpaca coat; there was a pencil stuck behind his ear, and a pair of glasses were slipped half-way down his nose. He appeared to be immersed in a document which he held in his hand.

"Gabrielle Lansoit, wife of Philippe Leguënné?" he inquired slowly, without looking up.

She slipped hurriedly past him, unlocked the door, looked at him beseechingly as he passed her and went inside.

"Who . . . ?" she asked.

"The bailiff," said the man, suddenly looking into her

eyes over his glasses, "here," and with a nasal voice, in a monotonous drawl he began to read, pausing a moment at each paragraph to read a few words louder and slower, as if he were trying to collect himself, then slurring over the rest of the sentence faster and faster.

Madame Leguënné sank down on to the chair next to the door; a whirl of sounds which she did not understand and obscure words passed over her; long series of numbers rumbled amongst them . . . in consideration of . . . seeing that . . . defendant did not appear . . . the court . . . droit général de consommation, l'octroi de la ville de Paris . . . droit d'entrée de l'Etat . . . a hundred and sixty francs . . . fifty francs . . . a hundred and eighty francs, le décime . . . soit quatre cent quatre-vingt-sept francs cinquante. . . .

The man coughed, took a deep breath.

Madame Leguënné stared at him foolishly.

Then he began afresh . . . frais du procès . . . assignation . . . enrégistrement . . . la présente signification . . . cinq cent trente-quatre francs, quarante-cinq centimes.

The bailiff laid the document on the table. She got up, she felt faint. . . .

He went on talking, she did not know what about . . . she realized vaguely that he was talking about her furniture . . . to be seized . . . eight days for reflection. . . .

She felt herself raise her hand to her eyes.

Then as if her ear-drums were bursting these words resounded sharply through her head:

"So you have got eight days for reflection . . . and if the sale does not realize a sufficient sum . . . four to eight months . . . I am sorry."

He had gone; the door which he had already closed behind him blew open with the draught . . . she heard his creaking boots on the stairs . . . she stood on the doorstep

... "Monsieur," she shouted in a hoarse voice ... she sat down beside the open door.

II

It was for the third time that Madame Leguënne made her way, feeling very diffident, through the double row of pillars to the imposing house in the Avenue Hoche. Once more she saw behind the white marble staircase the sumptuous glittering gold of the lift, which reminded her of the reliquary at Ste. Geneviève; she did not dare to make use of it ... and for the third time she started off on her long pilgrimage up the Persian-carpeted stair to the fourth floor where Monsieur le Comte de Maranaud Périgord had his apartment.

On Monday, Monsieur le Député was not at home; she was requested to call again on Tuesday morning. The day before, after waiting for half an hour in the gaudy hall covered with a dark green Axminster carpet, some one who called himself the secretary received her in a small office.

But Bonneau had been most emphatic in his warning; "Do not allow yourself to be put off with subordinates, be sure and speak to the Deputy himself—that friend of mine would never have managed it otherwise ..." and for this reason she had absolutely refused to tell this gentleman why she had come. Consequently he had left the room superciliously, and, on coming back again, informed her that she must write her reasons for coming and must return in a few days between ten and eleven o'clock.

He had already taken refuge behind his desk, when she recovered her senses and begged him to reconsider his decision ... in a few days! ... but that would be too late ... if Monsieur le Député could not help her to-morrow at the latest, she would be lost!" "Write to-day then," he said, "and come to-morrow morning. ..."

She suffered agonies of fear . . . to have to write! . . . when she hardly understood anything at all about the affair. . . . Carpentier had no time between twelve and two. . . . Leguënné had not come home yet at six o'clock . . . then Jeanne had taken her home . . . and Bonneau, who, the Saturday before when she was so desperate, came to her in the evening and had advised her to go to the Deputy of the Department. . . . She wondered if it would be any use . . . if she would ever be admitted. . . . She leant for a second against the red marble banister to recover her breath after the long climb, then she pressed the ivory bell-push.

A quarter of an hour later she was standing on the shiny parquet floor of a light room with three windows. Before she expected to see any one a fair-haired young man strolled into the room and glanced at her through his eyeglass on his way to the bureau . . . he wore a long morning-coat with a very defined waistline and as he walked the upper part of his body appeared quite rigid, whilst his legs alone moved forward. Arrived at his bureau the Count dropped his eyeglass, took up a letter from the table and skimmed its contents. . . .

"You come from the Haute Marne?" he said, sitting down in his office chair. "And your brother is a wine merchant?"

The slim hand toyed with his eyeglass.

"A farmer? Well, I'm afraid I can't do much for you, it is a matter for the city of Paris. Why not go to the councillor for your district . . . ? Who? I'm sure I do not know, but any one in your street could tell you that. . . . Besides," once again he placed his eyeglass in the corner of his eye, "I am going away to-morrow, I could not possibly take any steps for you. . . ."

The Deputy placed the middle finger of his gracefully moving hand on a button at the corner of his bureau . . .

there was a little tinkle and the lofty hall-door opened behind her.

"Show madame out."

She saw him incline his head very slightly towards her, and then light a cigarette . . . the door was closed behind her and a moment later the door of the apartment gently but firmly.

"Well!" the Carpentiers demanded simultaneously as she came into the loge.

She shrugged her shoulders; the Deputy had sent her to the councillor, and in five minutes she had left the house! . . .

In very low spirits she went downstairs to her basement.

In the evening, however, she came upstairs curiously elated. Just imagine where Leguënne wanted to send her now! . . . The chief or the assistant-director or some one of his tax-collecting staff lived in the Rue Danton on the same floor as a cocotte . . . who was the mistress of a big-wig in the Régie. . . . And that tax-collecting man—if you liked to believe Leguënne's tales—was supposed to have said that she ought to go there. . . . It was just like Leguënne! If she did not dare to go, he would go himself, he had said. She gazed heavenwards and looked as if she had only very narrowly escaped temptation and rather regretted it. . . .

"Did they think it was true?"

"What was true? That the woman lives there?" Carpentier inquired.

"No, that she might be able to help. . . ." Could a lady of that sort do any good . . . ? Did she not know that the whole of Paris was ruled by such women? It was well known that whoever wanted a decoration just got round such and such a minister's actress or some other influential

person's "dame." . . . In any case it was worth risking. . . .

She pressed the bell-push beside the light grey folding doors in rococo style.

An anæmic-looking servant dressed in black and with a white cap and apron appeared in the doorway. She said she would find out if Madame was at home. Madame Leguënné wanted to go in, but the maid shut the door hastily in her face.

Again she waited in the cheerful hall . . . how neat everything looked! . . . a brand new house. . . . She wondered about the rent of these apartments. Women like this were well off.

She glanced at herself in the large mirror which rose up from a border of hothouse plants . . . she was glad that she had bought that blue veil—it was smart and interesting looking . . . the lock creaked once more and: "Madame cannot see you just now."

"But I must speak to Madame . . . it is for the Régie . . . yesterday I was. . . ."

Some one inside spoke and the girl looked round.

"Will you follow me, please," she said.

Madame Leguënné went into a little hexagonal entrance hall, white enamelled and very light on account of the three doors with cut-glass window-panes and yellow silk casement curtains. Just as she came in she saw a grey skirt disappearing round the corner of the left-hand door . . . the girl preceded her through the middle door.

A drawing-room in yellow and blue; the small pieces of furniture were all curved and uneven; there were little chairs upholstered in yellow with bent legs and high curved backs, a whatnot which possessed several more stories on the one side than the other; and over the yellow silk divan against the dark blue-striped wall-paper hung an oblong

brown wooden mirror which was twice as wide at the top as at the bottom. Madame Leguënné's eyes from behind the blue veil wandered rapidly round the room with a sort of shamefaced envy . . . she was disappointed . . . she had expected immoral pictures or statues and luxurious couches, with perhaps the cast-off dressing-gown of the night before lying about, traces of cigarette smoking and a champagne supper and above all a looking-glass with obscene photographs stuck in the frame . . . there was nothing . . . an exquisite drawing-room, a costly drawing-room even. . . . The sound of tapping heels and rustling silk approached from the room next door; Madame Leguënné felt curiously faint; she was in the presence of . . . that woman . . . not such a very young woman, but so elegant! . . . Gabrielle considered her beautiful, and liked the downy whiteness of her powdered tenderly curved face, the bright red of her lips and the large grey black-rimmed eyes which blinked under the fringe of light brown glossy hair covering her forehead.

She bowed with a wry smile, revealing gleaming white teeth between the carmine lips, and invited Madame Leguënné to sit down with a gesture of her small transparent richly jewelled hand; she herself sank on to a low white-enamelled sofa, so that the grey-blue drapery of her gown fell round her feet in graceful folds; one white hand, with delicate blue veins, dropped over the arm of the chair, the other, with nervously moving fingers and glittering with precious stones, supported her chin and her cheek.

"You have come with a message from Monsieur Darty?"

Madame Leguënné, who now found that the bow-legged little chair upon which she had landed was lower than she had expected, was thoroughly intimidated and gazed at her companion as if in a dream.

When the latter repeated her question rather nervously, she said:

"Pardon, Madame, Monsieur Darty, is that your . . . ? is that the . . . the high official of whom I have heard? . . ."

The other woman frowned; she thought she was dealing with a lunatic.

"Yes, Monsieur Darty is Secretary of the Régie des Tabacs!" she remarked.

"Tobacco?" Madame Lèguenne echoed.

The other woman rose; "I believe you have come to the wrong address," she said, slightly indignant, and she put her two delicate hands up to the yellow tortoise-shell side-combs which secured the copper-coloured hair curving upwards from her white neck in smooth glossy bands.

"But has Monsieur nothing to do with the customs then? I was advised . . ."

Madame Leguënné's face was so confused by this time that the woman began to feel sorry for her; she sat down again. Madame Leguënné, still hesitating, began to tell her story; the other one listened, at first rather bored, and afterwards with more sympathy, and Gabrielle moaned on in a coquettish manner, gratified and encouraged by the growing interest of this richly dressed and now thoroughly friendly woman opposite her.

During the telling of her story, the latter had gradually become aware of the unusually flattering position in which she found herself. . . . Here was what she had always longed for, the thing of which she had heard her friends boast . . . some one had come to her for help, as if she herself were an influential person, like a great lady. She listened to the complaints of the miserable woman, who, persecuted by the customs, the justice and the police, knew of no way out and sought salvation with her.

She nodded in agreement or pity, with lines of sadness about her mouth, gazing at the woman opposite her with large staring sorrowful eyes, and now and again she

moistened the painfully closed lips with the tip of her tongue . . . what a pity, she thought, that Darty had nothing to do with the customs, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, what a dreadful pity . . . and in her desire to continue to play this moving and interesting rôle which had suddenly been allotted to her, she said with a sudden rush of apparently deep pity and the wish to help:

"Perhaps Monsieur Darty has influential acquaintances amongst these gentlemen. . . ."

Madame Leguënne sighed.

"Wait a minute, I will telephone . . ."

She got up, and gathering up the folds of her dress with both daintily curved hands, she tripped hastily to the dining-room. Madame Leguënne, who in spite of many confused thoughts and throbbing hope could not help feeling the uselessness of all these visits, sat staring outside without seeing anything, listening to the telephone bell and conversation without understanding any of it.

". . . listen . . . but perhaps you know . . . what . . . think it over . . . no . . . no, she is still here. . . ."

"No," came a husky voice from the distance, "no, I don't know any one at the customs . . . of course, why should I? . . . what are you thinking about?"

She came in again.

"Monsieur Darty will see what he can do," she lied with a nervous attempt to be affable. Suddenly she felt disillusioned and out of her depth . . . Madame Leguënne rose; she looked poor and queer but not without a certain dignity; the circumstances in which she found herself were more than humiliating, and yet the other woman suddenly had the disagreeable sensation of being the inferior.

"Cheer up, my dear," she said, putting her glittering hand on Gabrielle's shoulder, "everything will come right in the end."

Madame Leguënne was exceedingly grateful for this mark

of intimacy; but she felt a slight tremor of indescribable feelings as if she were being tempted and was thoroughly enjoying it. She cast a shy melting glance in the direction of the delicately powdered face and glossy fair hair so close to her own.

She felt sorry for having got up so soon.

In the meantime her companion had recovered and tripped with tapping heels and rustling skirts to the large folding doors, pressed the bell-push beside it and turned round.

"The servant will show you out," she said condescendingly from a distance.

Madame Leguëgne, who had followed her, looked down with tightly closed lips; the servant did not come; the two stood confronting each other by the cut-glass doors with the yellow silk casement curtains and waited. . . .

The woman, rather weary now, just opened the door and said, "Cécile! . . . Cécile! . . ." in a loud whisper.

The startled girl appeared.

"Show Madame out, will you?" she snapped.

Then with the sweetest smile, revealing the gleaming white teeth between her red lips, she held out a proud small hand towards Madame Leguëgne, shook hers with a little jerk and said "Adieu, Madame! . . . Good luck. . . ."

Saturday had come and naturally she had heard nothing from Madame la cocotte.

The Carpentiers—who at first had taken a violent interest in her vicissitudes and had enjoyed the "tragedy" in which they, in company with a very noble member and a smart lady of the *demi-monde* were concerned—now looked at her with angry eyes out of the loge.

When Friday came, their resentment was renewed owing to the probable disgrace in the house in connexion with the sheriff's officer and the policemen and the rubbishy furni-

ture which on the following Monday would be carried over their newly polished stairs.

Carpentier had tried to force her to go to more people. Why did she not go herself to the senator. "There was no use trusting to Bonneau! . . ."

She refused quite firmly—she would pay no more visits, it was too late now. . . .

"It is not too late," Carpentier urged, "the bailiff said eight days; the eight days are over on Monday, not on Saturday, you will see."

Madame Leguënné insisted that the eight days were over on Saturday; she refused to go.

"It is your affair," Carpentier said maliciously, "if you want to find yourself on the street, all right!"

Leguënné at bed-time was not much kinder; he had not got it, he declared, he had given her twenty francs house-keeping money the week before, and he assured her that if his furniture was sold, he would have nothing more to do with her; it was all owing to her stupidity, and her own look out. Why did she not borrow some money and pay it back later with what she earned. . . .

Not a soul appeared on that Saturday; there was no letter or news of any kind.

And when no news came on Sunday she took a desperate decision; next morning she would go to the Rue Réaumur: she had found the address in a paper of a place where they would lend her money "without security" . . . an usurer no doubt . . . she could not help it . . . she would leave word in the loge that Madame had gone to pay.

CHAPTER 5

I

ARISTIDE and Célestin had not come into the garden quite so early of late, and often Célestin was the first to make his appearance.

After the little quarrel at the "gargote" in the Rue Delambre, Aristide had done his best to make Jozette's life more cheerful.

They got up now long before daybreak, whilst it was still cool upstairs and the attic was filled with the fresh night air.

In the little room which Célestin had papered for them with blueish-grey paper, a cool green light filtered through the damp screen of leaves of the topmost elm branches, into the attic window, and opposite the window in the pure light of the morning, over a red couch, a mild piece of luxury, in its dull gilt frame, hung the picture of Jozette, a beautiful study of the nude which Aristide had tried to paint; the pale amber-coloured body, with its almost childlike curve of shoulder and hip, lay stretched on a dark bronze silken rug against a background of turquoise folds; her head, turned in the other direction, seemed to be looking at a small bright green bag which the right hand held up as in play.

Whilst Aristide took his daily shower-bath behind the curtain, Jozette would trip about the room in her wide pompadour dressing-gown and prepare the breakfast.

She spread the white napkin on the table by the window; on it she placed the white bowls of milk, the golden loaves and plates; also an egg in a white china cup. Aristide,

looking delightfully fresh in his cool linen suit, appeared casting his eyes with pleasure on the dainty morning meal. Then they sat down to the table. Jozette broke the bread which they dipped into their milk and Aristide ate his egg—he was not allowed to drink coffee on account of his nerves and he had to have plenty of nourishing food. . . .

Sitting close together they ate and talked and made love to each other. Jozette's little dressing-gown was cut out in a V in the front and at the back, so that under the curls at her neck and under the dimples at her throat, two triangles of soft flesh could be seen. Aristide's bare neck showed long and clear-skinned above his linen jacket . . . it was like the time of their dawning love. Jozette was happier than she had ever been during the four months that they had lived together. . . .

And when the sun rose over the elm, opposite the crest of which they were sitting, pouring through its thin-leaved top with glowing heat, flooding the little room with light—then the grey shutters would be closed and usually the windows as well, so that the snowy soft light crept in through the muslin curtains and hung like a strange pale mist over everything, making it all more beautiful.

It was like this that Aristide loved his studio best.

The low wide couch, which served them as a bed at night and which was now covered with a claret-coloured cloth and a variety of soft-toned cushions, was placed against the back wall in a strange atmosphere of sweet intimacy, above it the gilt frame, which now seemed wrapped in mystery, glowed with a soft lustre . . . and the red folds at the bottom fell darkly against the peacock blue and white shiny mat.

In the corner behind the window there was an old arm-chair upholstered in green rep and a little oak cupboard which, in the dusk, looked like a dark piece of antique

furniture against the shadowy floor covered with small hexagonal tiles. And, on the opposite side between the couch and the cupboard door of the other wall, there was the large brown polished easel, and underneath it the rest of the painter's tools.

Whilst Jozette washed up the dishes behind the turquoise curtain, Aristide would gaze about the room with dreamy eyes; or he would stand by the couch and stare at the picture . . . in this semi-darkness there was nothing about it which did not please him . . . he expected great things of the future and would think rather pityingly of Célestin, who in his stuffy little attic, was probably still asleep. And when a little later the sun beat in at the window and on the roof, and under the sloping ceiling the hot day which was to be expected made itself felt, Jozette would get dressed and together they would set out for a walk.

With their arms round each other, they strolled happily along the cool damp sand of the Avenue de l'Observatoire, over which only a rare patch of sunlight trembled; a scented freshness drifted over the wide smooth lawns and from the many-coloured flower borders round them, which had been watered in the early hours and now glittered and quivered in the soft breeze of the summer morning,—a moist mass of clear colours in delicate haze of vapour. A heavy smell of earth rose up from the dripping patches of grass in the sunshine, over which, in a cloud of diamond drops and shining arches of light, the singing spray of the hose pattered down. . . .

These lawns were like carpets of pure emerald, and in the distance, looking pale and fragile, the stone statues on their pedestals, still suffused with the break of dawn, rose up from this sparkling green. . . .

At the end of the avenue, shaded by Jozette's little parasol, they hurried across the Rue Auguste-Comte, which seemed

ablaze with heat, and entered the Luxembourg proper, through the high glittering golden gateway.

And Jozette, guessing Aristide's thoughts, talked more cheerfully, and tightened her arm round his waist, whilst they turned at once into the winding paths at the side . . . the terraces and lanes, round the lake; she had heard Célestin say that Thierry worked there in the mornings . . . and Aristide, guessing her sweet thought, held her closer, and bending down he pressed a surreptitious kiss on her little ear.

There was hardly any one in this corner of the garden, and at the first curve of the path their hungry little army of sparrows came fluttering down, hopping across the moist brown sand. . . . Bouboule, the pert little tailless sparrow, was there also, and, twisting his tiny round head, came closer towards them with two short hops.

Aristide took the remains of the rolls out of his pocket, then began that sweet merry morning feast, which is so dear to the heart of the nature-loving Parisian.

Whilst they were still busy dividing the bread, the bravest ones flew up, hovered for a moment above their heads, resting on their fluttering wings, begging, and then came down again. . . . Others hopped quite close to their feet, chirping shrilly; and when they threw up the first crumbs, ten or twelve sparrows darted up like so many rockets, fighting for the snowy morsels; as they snatched one, making away with it and then fluttering near again. . . . Now and then another batch appeared from amongst the leaves above their heads, and from among the thick shrubs across the surrounding border of geraniums one or two came hopping along out of curiosity.

And whilst the crumbs like soft white snowflakes fluttered in the air, they were often snapped up by those on the ground. Some of them flying about never succeeded in

getting any at all. Sometimes they would throw some down on purpose for Bouboule, who had great difficulty in flying without his tail, and the sharp little bird, all the quicker because of this, hopped towards them in a second.

They rejoiced like two children when their bit was snapped up in mid-air, jealous of each other and boasting naively about their own skill and good luck.

But Jozette was first favourite with the sparrows, and bending down a little, very carefully she rubbed a crumb between two fingers, positively tingling with expectation, until the delightful moment came, and the little beak of a frightened beady-eyed fluttering bird, pecked at the warm flesh where her fingers met, stealing the moist ball of bread. And again, faintly smiling, with a sweet expression in her quiet eyes, she kneaded another bit, and once more a small open beak pecked at her sensitive finger-tips. . . .

Aristide, watching her with throbbing senses, thought how lovely she was, this exquisite little woman, bending down a trifle, the lines of her back and arm so intent, her fingers held out carefully, a soft blush on her cheek, her thoughtful shining eyes, her small mouth slightly open—everything seeming to express an entire surrender of herself in breathless anticipation. . . .

The bread was finished. Jozette, with a slight exclamation, threw a last shower high up in the air, rubbed her hands together to clean them; the sparrows, startled, dispersed noisily, but soon started pecking again, and when Aristide put his arm round the little woman and they walked on together, they hopped behind them like a small army.

They went along the shady paths. An iron cupola was overgrown by a purple clematis, and as they made their way along the glittering sunny lawn, they were accompanied by the silky spray of a hose, a dim rainbow. . . . A dove resting at the edge of this spray held one wing wide

outspreed towards the drops which turned the shiny white down into mother-of-pearl.

And Aristide did not tire of this wandering around; they took the little dark cool path beside the Rue de Luxembourg, where under the big trees, gazing into space, Chopin grieves on his damp green pedestal; they walked round the little Museum garden with its pathetic acacia with the twisted branches which Aristide always meant to sketch, past the sunny scented rose groves, then back to the gardens beside the bee-houses.

This after all was more like Paradise than any other corner of the garden. . . . Scarlet and misty blue and shimmering pink, the flower borders trembled and blazed and glowed at the bottom of the dusky green shrubs, amongst which rare trees inclined their heads; large beds, a mass of purple eyes, many-hued with pansies, and with white begonias pale as wax, lay among the glittering green; and on a velvety slope which led to a grove, there were some rose-bushes which had been made to grow like low round tables overflowing with red and white blossoms like silken floss.

Aristide was delighted with everything and full of plans; during each walk he saw a dozen pictures to be painted . . . he did not notice how curiously pale and pinched Jozette's small face sometimes looked after dawdling about with him. Towards eight o'clock they were home again; they would linger a moment by the front door if there was any one in the hall . . . then by the stairs they kissed . . . Jozette went up and Aristide went down to the garden.

Whistling softly, he ran along the steps feeling as luxurious as a prince . . . he felt that he was tasting the exquisite joys of life, he had a pretty and dainty little woman, a sweet home, some work . . . he was living the life of a gentleman! Paris was the best of cities! . . . Just fancy if they knew this at Roubaix! . . . Down-

stairs he found Célestin, and they had a pleasant morning of work in the cool garden; but for Jozette, in the stuffy little room under the roof, began the torture of the long exhausting, hot day,

II

And one morning in the beginning of August when the first shower of rain, followed by a thunderstorm, broke, Jozette suddenly fell ill.

With a feverish red face she tossed about on the wide couch, and Aristide, desperate, looked out of the window every few minutes to see if Célestin were not appearing. It was past eight o'clock. If only he did not stay at home on account of the rain . . . but surely he would not do that? he would sit in the summer-house and he kept all his belongings there . . . then all at once he wondered if Célestin had come to collect his things and gone away again, just at the moment when he was not looking . . . he thought he had better go downstairs. . . . Lourty was luckily out of town . . . but Jozette, moaning, looked at him in such a helpless fashion that, after all, he did not dare.

At last he heard Célestin's whistle: "Bibi, are you at home? Are you coming? What, I don't understand you, must I come upstairs?" In less than no time he was there. He was full of advice: he would buy some quinine at Thibault's, and Jozette must drink some "tisane" . . . he could make "tisane." With his cap the wrong way round, he hurried off; in ten minutes he was back again. He had four wafer cachets in a bag, and another with some musty-smelling herbs, with which he boiled a tincture in a little pan; it was accompanied by an unpleasant odour of fennel and peppermint. But in the afternoon Jozette was no better, nor the following day.

Her temperature appeared to be normal, but she lay there

quite listless, as if thoroughly exhausted, did not touch any of the delicacies which the boys brought her. She hardly opened her eyes. The evening light streaming in at the window alone seemed to revive her a little . . . she brushed her tangled hair back from her forehead and allowed them to shake up her pillows and sat leaning against them. Every now and then she tried to cheer Aristide with a sweet wan smile, but talking tired her; she closed her eyes for a moment and very soon fell into a restless sleep. Not a single complaint had crossed her lips during the long day.

But on the second evening when the boys—it was already dark outside—were on their way to the little restaurant where they now dined, Célestin could not hide his indignation any longer . . . he would kill her . . . kill her . . . Jozette ought to have remained with Thierry who treated her like a human being . . . he would kill her with his selfishness and jealousy.

Aristide, as white as a sheet, did not answer, he just gazed into space, as if in a trance.

And when he came home alone, he fell on his knees by the couch and wept, his face on her arm.

"Oh, chérie . . . chérie! . . ."

Surely he was not bad to her? They were happy together? he had done all he could? . . . Every morning they had gone for a walk and every evening! . . . Was there anything he could do for her now? . . . he would do anything . . . she had just to say the word . . . but oh! . . . if she would only say that they were happy together . . . that he was kind to her. . . ."

"T'es gentil, Bibi . . . T'es gentil. . . ." she said and stroked his fair hair lovingly.

On the second day the rumour of Jozette's illness had spread through the house and had brought about a sudden interest in "the young artist and his little lady! . . ." It was as if all at once, the provincially silent and virtuous

household came to an abrupt realization that a Paris idyll was being enacted under its roof, and considered this rather sweet. . . .

"Poor thing," said Madame Carpentier pityingly; her heart melted as she remembered how she used to see these two go out every morning with their arms round each other's waists in complete harmony, and she wondered if she should take up a cup of beef-tea some time. The German professor stopped Aristide in the hall. Julie asked Jeanne about it and Madame Dutoit said, "What must that poor boy do now?"

And, on the third day when Célestin had just suggested calling in a doctor, Valency came upstairs of his own accord.

Not knowing where to go—he had never been higher up than the third floor—he had knocked at a door several times without getting an answer . . . when a little old lady shuffled out from behind the next door and showed him the way. And so he found himself all at once in the small room which under Célestin's rule had assumed an odd sort of tidiness. Célestin himself was standing by the turquoise curtain, which was wide open, stirring some bread and milk on the gas cooker and Aristide, in desperation, sat at the table which was covered with newly washed glasses and cups. . . . They appeared to be surprised and nervous at the unexpected visit. . . . Resting against her pillows, Jozette was gazing listlessly in the other direction with heavy tired eyes; she looked up languidly. . . . Valency, his thin lips compressed in a scarcely visible smile, in which there was something of amiability and mocking and shamefacedness, said something about "neighbours" and the "same house" . . . he thought these boys good-natured and amusing, but was a trifle shy about the uninvited call, and in spite of himself, his sparkling eyes wandered towards

the nude picture over the couch . . . then settling his gold glasses in a professional manner, he began his doctor's catechism. Célestin had left the room and Aristide went on stirring the bread and milk clumsily, till Jozette noticed and motioned to him to turn off the gas.

No, she had not got any pain . . . she said, no pain in the back of her head . . . nor yet in her arms and legs . . . no pain, just tired. During his questioning Valency's curious glances strayed every now and then from the little patient to the wall above her. Jozette felt overcome with shame; she turned her suddenly scarlet face restlessly in the pillows and looked away.

Within ten minutes the doctor left; it was not serious, he had said—she was run down . . . on no account quinine . . . and sitting at the table, he had asked for pen and ink. Slowly reading aloud, he wrote down a laconic prescription: firstly rest, secondly, fresh air, thirdly, sniff some vinegar now and then and bathe the wrists and back of the head with vinegar and lastly, a soothing draught . . . he would look in again in a day or two. . . .

But he appeared again on the following afternoon. After a few cool days, the atmosphere had again become charged with thunder and very hot and he found Jozette looking ill and dozing fitfully in a temperature of ninety degrees. She lay there, the thin cover half-kicked away, one slim ankle and foot bare, the other leg drawn up in the folds of the sheet, her arms resting heavily on either side, looking fragile and like pale amber against the sleeves of her nightdress. Her white pale face, looking smaller than ever, was thrown back, moist and helpless. The atmosphere was almost sodden with the faintly acrid smell, of faded flowers, perspiration and vinegar. The painting above her was covered with a large white cloth, but Valency felt so sorry for the little woman that he scarcely noticed it. . . .

This could not go on . . . he would speak to those boys. . . .

Jozette awoke with a slight start, but whilst she hurriedly arranged the sheet, she noticed a serious look in Valency's always curiously smiling face.

"Well, how are you?" he said kindly.

She smiled back vaguely. . . . He had taken a chair and began to question her in a covert manner as to her circumstances . . . how did she spend her days . . . why did she not walk more . . . especially in the afternoons when it was so hot upstairs? Why did she not go into the garden?

But Jozette's answers were always evasive and unsatisfactory . . . she did not wish the doctor to condemn Aristide. And so he didn't get much further. He must talk to these boys. . . .

Going away he met on the landing the little old lady who had shown him the way on the day before.

"How are they getting on in there, M'sieur le Docteur?" she questioned, indicating somewhat hesitatingly the painter's *ménage*. Valency felt the rather narrow-minded aversion of the little old maid for the fallen girl; according to his lights, this was amusing and rather foolish; but under the slightly wavy curtains of grey hair, the small face with its soft yellowish pale flesh, which was at the same time smooth, with here and there a friendly wrinkle, looked so demurely sweet and so alert that he could not be rude. He even went the length of being talkative, contrary to his usual custom; very ill? . . . no, not for the moment . . . but that might easily happen . . . it was not the right sort of life for a young creature, day after day in the stifling attic in the sun . . . it seemed that the boys worked in the garden, they were all right . . . she was there alone, almost in an oven, panting for air. . . .

III

Mademoiselle Villetard went in at her door but did not close it. . . . She remained standing, the brass knob in her hand. . . . Should she go across the landing? . . . Should she go and have a chat with that . . . girl? . . . Was there nothing that she could take her? She shot the bolt in the lock and went into the room. She was afraid of seeing strange sights in the artist's flat, and that girl; after all, why should she interfere? . . . In the room she dawdled by the table, but did not take off her little cloak and scarf.

Mademoiselle Villetard was a born Parisian. Her entire youth had been spent in a quiet countrified street at the back of the "Invalides." Being the only daughter of a civil servant without means, she had had an exceedingly simple and secluded upbringing. Very young, she was sent to a Calvinistic girls' school, and later on she had been trained as a school teacher. Very occasionally, perhaps, to celebrate a birthday she had been taken for a day to the Bois de Boulogne or for the afternoon to the Louvre, and once when she was older to the Théâtre Français . . . that night she had stayed with a cousin who, at the time lived in a third-floor flat in the Rue de Mail. When she was eighteen she had seen Notre Dame three times, the Place de la Bastille once, and she had never yet been to Montmartre. One quiet day after the other she worked in the little room which had been allotted to her in the parental apartment. Accompanied by her father or mother, she went for a daily walk in the peaceful suburb. She made her own dresses and so, like many others, she lived in Paris just as happy and ingenuous as the most guileless country maiden who knows nothing about any sort of life except her own. From the age of twenty-two to sixty-two she had been

governess to a number of families of the Protestant nobility, all related to each other, who had taken her, the one from the other, and sometimes had engaged her three years ahead. There she had spent her days in the seclusion of nurseries and school rooms, and young girls' boudoirs, during the winter in Paris, during the summer at the various country seats, her life divided up into hours for lessons and needlework and walks . . . a drive in the castle grounds or the Bois de Boulogne, a Sunday morning's outing to the Oratory Church, and when her pupil was beginning to grow up, she would accompany her to a charity sale or to a Corneille tragedy.

At fifty she knew as little of the world as at twenty-five . . . she had saved a certain amount, received a few small legacies and inherited a little money from an aunt, and when, at last, after her sixty-second birthday, she was going to live her own life, the great question was where to settle down. She would have liked to return to the parental street, with the green vistas into the gardens of the great houses in the *quartier* and on to the gilded dome of the Invalides, but everything had changed and was completely built over, and also her favourite pupil, Emilie de Pourtales, now Baronne de Neuflize, lived in the Avenue de l'Observatoire, and another ex-pupil owned a villa in the Rue de Luxembourg; these two were in the habit of asking her to dinner about once a month . . . and with warmhearted loyalty she thought it unfriendly to live too far away; and so she had decided on the Rue Barral, and once she was settled there with her own bits of furniture in her own little apartment, she would not have changed her abode for any other at any price.

She was still enraptured with her two rooms—not attics, because the house was built up to the front, the fifth floor set back a little, so that there was a wide balcony along the entire width of the front wall—delighted with the bal-

cony, where, starting in the early spring, she busied herself, sowing and planting pots and boxes, a never-ending occupation whenever she could spare the time from her miniature household. As the aspect was north-west, there was not much sun, but she never wearied of carting her cuttings and plants in and out of the rooms. She lived contentedly and at peace among her flowers, at peace with her dear neighbours as well, on the right, the young couple named Giraud, with their pretty two-year-old child, M'sieur Jean, who shook hands through the bars of the small railing when his mother was sewing on the balcony, and, to the left, the two milliners from the Rue des Pyramides, two well-behaved girls who were also devoted to their room and their balcony, and with whom she liked to chat across the fir hedge which took the place of the dividing rail there. Mademoiselle Villetard had no dealings with the inhabitants of the back rooms; in one of them lived the concierge's boarder, a respectable workman, a mason by trade, and in the one which for a long time had been occupied by a student, lived the artist with that . . . girl. . . .

Mademoiselle Villetard stood at the open balcony door in her bedroom, her little scarf in her hand, her hat still on. She looked at her balcony and thought how pretty it was . . . how cool and fresh . . . across the roof of the laboratory she could see the thick green crests of the Observatory trees, just like living in the country . . . and her flowers were doing well . . . on the day before, the carnations had opened their first buds, scarlet and white, and her marguerites were in full bloom. . . .

Supposing she went and had a look at that girl she thought again . . . after all she was ill. . . .

She hesitated partly because her shy disposition made her dread meeting strangers. She put on her jacket, but still hesitated. . . . Then suddenly she decided quite definitely that she must go, and without further doubts or

wonderings as to what she should say, she went and shuffled through the dark stuffy little hall at the end of which an uncertain chink of light showed her the way—the doctor had not closed the door of the room. She was so confused with the sudden carrying out of her plan that she forgot to knock, and only realized this as she held the knob of the door, which very gently she had pushed open, in her hand.

“May I come in?”

She had just caught sight of Jozette as she lay half-propped up, resting on one elbow, her thin cheek in the palm of her hand, gazing wearily into space, her eyelashes flickering: then turning her head with a quick movement of pleasure towards the creaking door, full of surprise, and with an astonished ejaculation:

“Yes, yes, come in, Madame,” she said.

There was a curious mixture of fear, distrust and an effort to be friendly in the little voice which had suddenly become hoarse. She coughed, and when Mademoiselle Villetard with two flaming patches on her old cheeks had come closer, pointing to the chair on which Dr. Valency had sat, she said in a slightly more friendly tone of voice:

“Sit down, please. . . .”

“I wanted to come and see how you were getting on,” the old lady began in a demure, pleasant voice; “we live so close to each other and the doctor told me . . .”

“It is very kind of you,” Jozette added gently, and she made an effort to pull herself up.

“I hope I am not disturbing you,” the little lady said anxiously as she noticed the strained look on the pale clammy face, small and frail between the heavy coils of black hair hanging down into an untidy mass at the neck.

“No, oh, not at all,” said Jozette, with a faint attempt at cheerfulness.

They looked at each other. The old lady spoke with a particularly correct accent and pronounced some of her

words in a slightly odd manner which astonished Jozette and appeared to her affected, but at the same time rather sweet.

"But my child"—slightly more at her ease, Mademoiselle Villetard threw her scarf back from her shoulders—"are you not terribly hot here?"

Jozette nodded with a helpless childish gesture. "Later on, when the sun has gone down," she said, "I shall sit by the open window. . . ."

"Does the doctor allow that? . . . Have you no temperature. . . ."

"No, only a little weak. . . ."

"Mon Dieu, how warm it is," thought the little old lady again; she unfastened her bonnet strings and, smiling her sympathy to Jozette, she wondered what she could do for the invalid. . . . Her balcony . . . her spacious cool balcony . . . perhaps that might be arranged. She told herself how the Girauds had the width of one room between the three of them; the milliners shared the width of one room. . . . She had a double one to herself. Why should she, an old woman, have a double one? She alone a balcony which would hold about ten people. . . .

"What pretty roses," she said vaguely. Jozette smiled back. And what a tidy room, she thought again; rather different from other people's but very neat . . . and that blue curtain, perhaps the painter slept behind it. . . . It gave her unconsciously a sensation of respectability to see Jozette lying on that couch. She was a trifle dismayed when she noticed the large cover over the picture . . . but she put it out of her mind. She wiped the beads of perspiration from her temples, and thought of her own cool rooms. . . .

"Dearie," said Mademoiselle Villetard, "won't you dress and come and sit outside with me? Just put a dressing-gown over your nightdress. . . ."

Jozette was a little alarmed for the moment at this suggestion: she wondered what Aristide would say, and then

she glanced at the old lady who was looking at her full of generous expectation; joy leapt into her eyes; she nodded, very shy, and almost started to rise.

Then, in her turn, Mademoiselle Villetard became suddenly nervous. . . . Surely she could not be present whilst the girl got out of bed and dressed . . . suppose that painter should come in. . . . Her small black-gloved hand shot out as if to prevent the coverlet from sliding down. . . . "Can you manage by yourself," she asked, "and come across to me? Then I will go and put your chair ready. . . ."

Jozette, slightly dismayed at the restraining gesture, nodded again . . . then, quite pleased, she pushed her white feet from under the sheet and put them on the tiled floor. . . .

"Take care, take care!" Mademoiselle Villetard said.

Quickly she placed the small black slippers, which were under the oak cupboard, in front of the couch, and nervously escaped with a kind, hurried "Au revoir!"

And after that, every morning and every afternoon, Jozette sat for an hour or two in the pure atmosphere of the high balcony garden, and she improved visibly. She sat there in her clean morning-gown, her curly hair brushed away from her forehead, which made her face look fuller, rounder and younger, like that of a school girl.

Mademoiselle showed her a thousand small attentions, put her most comfortable basket-chair outside, trailed backwards and forwards with cushions and shawls and a footstool . . . then, whilst she was attending to her housewifely duties inside, she would come out every now and then with a question or a story. Clad in a black-spotted dressing-jacket, and with her head bare, an old woman's delicate low forehead surmounted by smoke-grey hair brushed away from her flesh-white parting, the little face unwrinkled, and in the morning, white as wax under the little grey waves,

she looked even sweeter than in her black lace hat and her black stately clothes.

The sick girl on the balcony, another flower to be nursed, had soon found a niche in her quite life. She had almost forgotten that Jozette was actually an improper girl . . . at least as long as she had her alone; twice, when Dr. Valency had looked her up, she had become uneasy and shy, and when, on the third day, Aristide himself appeared and kissed Jozette's cheek on the open balcony, she hurried into the room next door, so angry and frightened that Jozette had begged him in the evening not to come again. . . . Aristide considered this ridiculous, but promised all the same, and Mademoiselle Villetard breathed a thankful "Thank you, dearie," when Jozette hinted at this.

Mademoiselle Villetard did not often find time to come and have a quiet talk with her young patient. . . . There was always a good deal to see to in this small household, and it cost her much anxious thought, because she did everything herself, and she had never been accustomed to these sorts of cares during her life of teaching in the houses of the wealthy. . . . The cooking on the gas-stove in particular brought new difficulties every day, and whenever she had an hour to spare she read her *Revue Universelle*, and then there was the *Revue des Revues*, which the Baronne de Neuffize sent her every fortnight: she wanted to keep abreast with the times, especially to remain worthy of her company in the houses of her old pupils. . . . What, otherwise, was the use of that book-learning in one's youth? . . . She sat inside, with her back to the window, in her arm-chair and her feet on a low cushion . . . and Jozette, far above the little noises of the not very noisy street, left to her own thoughts, looked about her and amused herself with what she saw, dreaming her jangled nerves back to rest.

The summer street-life, with its trivial happenings, seen

through the thick bars of the balcony railing, went on without any fatiguing reality, just as if it were a joke. . . . There were the pointed ears, stuck through a straw hat, and the shiny swaying back of a little horse, the white top-hat of the cabman and the green cloth folds of an empty *fiacre*, which drove past, below; at eleven o'clock there was the sudden scattering of small boys across the street and along the pavement and into the side streets, whenever a form in the high-class boys' school close by was dismissed. . . . About four houses farther down on the opposite side of the street, there was Millet's shop, where through the open side of the low sun-blind a corner of the outside window-stall could be seen; the baskets of fruit heaped up high on the large hampers of glistening greens; sometimes there would be the cheerful red of radishes tied in bunches, or the spongy jaded orange of a pile of tomatoes.

It was always a special treat to Jozette when a flower-seller passed: the stooping vendor's basket dipped towards the pavement, full of bright spots and streaks of colour, of quivering red rose branches or flaming gladioli, the pure white sheen of bunches of lilies or of rosy peonies. . . . Sometimes she leant across the railing to catch a little of the sweet scent which floated along through the street. . . .

Jozette, who came from Montmarte, found again in this southerly quarter all the well-known street noises of the north: the nasal clarionet call of the chair-mender behind his donkey-cart; the tragic manner in which the tinker sang in his trembling tenor; she even thought she recognized the same little old man with his "Mouron pour les petits oiseaux . . ." and the glazier, walking with the sun flickering on his transom full of window-panes, uttered his curt "Voici l'vitrier" just the same as at Montmarte. Very soon she was quite at home. Mademoiselle Villetard sometimes came to have a look at Jozette, when they would giggle together over some amusing incident or the old lady,

with a solemn worried face, would give her opinion on the subject of begging along the street: for instance, that man with the curly beard, surely he could find some occupation; or about the using of children like that terrible grandmother did, and Jozette thoroughly agreed with her. They chattered away like two sensible little women.

But that was never for very long, because oh! something was boiling over . . . Mademoiselle Villetard would rush inside, and Jozette, resting her arm on the railing and her head on the back of her hand would look out again. . . .

It was a pleasant street, the Rue Barral, a street full of variations of tints and shapes, with fantastic corners rising and falling across the blue of the summer sky, between the massive blocks of five or six-storied houses, straight up against the sky, the high, windowless side walls, patches of white in the sunlight, the lower ridges of glistening slate, cheerful with the chimney-pots of the private hotels and the still higher red-roofed and turreted building of a lyceum, or the outline of the façade broken away to the ground, and over an iron railing or a wall there was the sunny green square of a large garden.

If Jozette were sitting with her back to the Girauds' little railing, then she could see right down the slightly curving street, till it was lost in a maze of roofs, above which, in the hot grey distance, the two hazy blue spires of Sainte Clotilde arose. If she turned her back on the milliners' little gate, then she could see the street widening out into the Place de l'Observatoire, the most distant chestnut trees in the avenue and the outermost spray of the Carpeaux fountain; straight ahead was the garden wall of the Bal Bullier surmounted with gaudy-coloured balls.

But she did not like to look that way . . . she had no happy memories of that place. . . .

Then suddenly she smelt again that strong musty smell of dust and musk and face powder; she felt the dryness of

mouth and eyes, the stinging wide-open eyes that would like to weep, and the smiling mouth whose parchedness nothing could slake. . . . Oh! those terrible months which had elapsed between the departure of her first lover and her liaison with Thierry. . . . No, she never had the makings of a "fille." . . . The horror of those other evenings when the Bullier was not open! Then without the heady excitement of the music, without the fierce gaiety and the furious dancing of the can-can, as if she wished to kick despair from her—the walking and walking backwards and forwards and back again, and among the little tables, in front of the Harcourt and the Café du Panthéon.

She was very young then, barely seventeen. She had tried everything to keep her head above water; she would willingly have gone to work at a studio as she did before the Fleming enticed her to Meudon; but how was she to get work without a recommendation, known to no one but those who had seen her wandering around the night cafés in the Quartier Latin. . . . And to go back to Montmartre, where she was known as the respectable midinette of earlier days, but where also lived her father and brothers, she did not want to do this. At last she had succeeded in securing a place as a bead-threader in a business where wreaths were made, but the manager, who had found out what she had been, desired her for himself, and when she refused had sent her away, and after that she had embroidered chemises for a cocotte-shop on the Boul' Mich', but the wages were so low that she could not pay the rent of her little room on the fifth floor of a furnished house in the Rue St. Andrée des Arts, that little room where she lived through such weary hungry days after such sad nights, so she was turned out. For a few weeks everything went wrong; after that she had been accepted as an artist's model . . . and so she had come to Thierry.

Thierry was the first of all the men during those four

months for whom she had any liking at all. Thierry was broad and fair; he had light soft brown eyes and a fair curly beard. He had carried her off away from the dangers of her much-hated existence to the quiet of his studio in Grenelle! She had always remained grateful to him for that . . . she had even got to like him better; nevertheless, she was not happy. She did not mind in the least that they were sometimes very poor, but she knew only too well that Thierry did not really care for her. Thierry was ambitious: he worked hard, he worked with the fury of the forty-year-old who is bent on success, and who recognizes that his time and his gifts are limited. In his rather cynical superiority he did not deny that he considered Jozette a dear child, who attended to all his wants, but whom he could not take too seriously; very often he paid no more attention to her than he did to his dinner or his clothes which she mended. He worked, and he had a special knack of soothing Jozette in one of her rebellious moods, with a single casual look from his compelling, gentle eyes. . . . When she was eighteen Jozette began to feel that she was getting sedate and old. . . .

From his studio in Grenelle, she had gone with him to his studio in Batignolles. . . . Thierry was already beginning to make a name: he exhibited at the "Artistes Français"; one of his pictures was described in detail in the *Figaro*; he received orders . . . sometimes he would give Jozette two hundred francs a month for housekeeping and as much for her clothes. . . . He dined out a great deal.

And then, after three years, at an artists' party in the Rue Cadet, Jozette met the young sentimental Aristide.

Aristide, who was still very much of a country cousin, immediately fell violently in love. . . . It was a mixture of boyish enthusiasm and of ardent adoration, of impatience and shyness and admiration which made Jozette feel as if

her faded youth had suddenly blossomed forth once more in full glory!

Aristide was fair and white-skinned, exactly as she liked a man to be; he was young, full of vague illusions, merry and tender, with a gentle disposition. She loved him as she had never loved any one before. It had been a blind surrender for all time.

Not quite two weeks after the party she had told Thierry: "I am going away . . . I am going to live with Baroche . . ."

Thierry, somewhat astonished, and feeling that his life's calculations had been rather rudely upset, had admonished her: "Is your life with me not care-free and pleasant? . . . What sort of life can that boy offer you? . . . You must consider well what your are about to do. . . ." But that sober passionless attitude had only irritated Jozette . . . not one single expression of real feeling, not one word of real regret at her departure. . . .

"Oh you, you are old!" she had snapped, in a sudden burst of her old rebelliousness. And so she went off. . . . That was now five months ago.

And had these five months brought her what she expected?

"Sst . . . sst . . ." she whispered to herself in terror almost, and her little hand had clutched the arms of Mademoiselle Villetard's basket chair tightly. . . .

Whether Aristide? . . .

"Sst . . . sst . . ." She must not think of that . . . not think of that. . . . She must get well again . . . soon be quite strong . . . for she loved Aristide, and that was the main thing.

And in order to escape the torment of these thoughts she plunged herself in the misery of the past as though to find a haven in the present.

She saw herself once more stitting at the front window of a little restaurant in Montmarte, to which the Fleming from

Meudon had dragged her in spite of all her protests. It was quite close to the street where her father carried on his little business. She had turned away from the window, so as not to be seen, had sat behind the lace curtains . . . she could still recall the pattern of them. They drank expensive sweet wine, and with his pocket-knife he cut large slices of rice-cake on the tissue-paper in which he had brought it. The crumbs scattered themselves over the grey marble table. He had done wonderfully good business that week, he had told her, smiling with his strong white teeth; she also should have her share, and across the crumby table-top he put twenty francs in either hand. . . . Alarmed rather than pleased, she hesitated, but he pressed the coins into her hand and filled up her glass once more. . . . Then he went and paid at the counter in the next room. . . .

Tapping the coins gently against the foot of the glass, she waited and thought . . . then she emptied her glass. She had pondered all sorts of things. . . . Unconsciously she had been looking out where, in the distance, Paris became hazy and undulated towards the horizon, whilst emerging from those floating smoky mists was the white or grey of steeples according to the rays of the sun, and the glittering of the golden cupolas. . . . She saw again that old well-known view. . . . She remembered how, sitting on her father's arm, still quite tiny, he had pointed out all the churches to her. . . . Later on, when she was a little girl of six or thereabouts, she had imagined that all those thousands of red chimney-pots dotted about over the flat-roofed blocks of houses were all earthen flower-pots placed upon the roofs. . . . At that moment everything trembled in a moist haze, and she felt a lump in her throat. . . . With a shock she suddenly recognized a familiar face passing close to the window. . . . It was a woman who lived in her street . . . with whom she used to go shopping before her flight to Meudon. . . . All at once she thought: "Where is he?"

Holding the coins convulsively in her hands, she had waited a little longer with a steadily increasing sensation of approaching disaster. . . . When she glanced at the clock, she saw that she had been alone for half an hour. The innkeeper hovered round, looking at her. . . .

"Has he left you, your m'sieur?" he had questioned in a half-pitying half-inquisitive tone of voice.

Jumping up, she had fastened her fur round her neck. . . .

"Monsieur has paid," said the innkeeper.

She was already outside the door; she knew it, he had gone . . . she would never see him again . . . she understood it all. That was why he had taken her to Montmartre . . . close to the street where her father lived. . . . He wanted her to go back to her father . . . with those forty francs. . . . She was to go home again . . . he had bought her off with forty francs. Like a mad woman she had flown down the long straight Rue de Clignancourt, on and on till she reached the fortification. Then she ran back again and into another street, and then into other streets and squares. She did not care where she went; she had reached the Seine. She could feel even now how she had crept along the Quai with failing will-power as the evening fell; how once she had gone down the steps, her legs trembling, the blood in her body tingling, and had got close to the water . . . she had been too much of a coward. She had slept that night in a small hotel there, and so she had drifted into the Quartier Latin. Then she recollected another evening a few months later, when, on the Boulevard St. Michel, a boy had handed her a note: it was from her eldest brother. . . .

"Oh, the wretches! the wretches!" she had reviled them to herself. They knew then where she was . . . they knew what she was doing, and they left her to her own devices. . . . They had not warned her when her father

was ill; they had not sent for her when her father died. . . .
"Oh, the wretches!"

He told her in the letter that her father was buried a week ago. . . . She could send for what was due to her, also for the trunk with her belongings, which had been sent from Meudon. "Oh, scoundrels, the dirty wretches!"

That evening, she who had always been rather staid at those mad festivities had danced like fury, raising her skirts up to her hips, till the crowd of onlookers shouted "Bravo, bravo!" In a kind of devilish excitement she had at last gathered her skirts together in front and danced past the tables, mimicking a beggar-woman: "A poor girl who has lost her father and her brothers! A poor girl who has lost her father and her brothers."

With this she had scored a tremendous success . . . the sous and the nickel coins and the francs had rained into her lap. . . . When the evening drew to a close, she danced outside with hundreds of people following her, her skirt full of jingling money, and with one swing all the coins flew over the gate into the little underground station . . . like snow in the bright moon-light the silver pieces glittered on the glass roofs and between the rails. . . . There was a hurrah which must have awakened every one in the neighbourhood of the Observatoire, and it had made her popular for weeks at Bullier's . . . but that evening she would not take any one with her to her room, and that night she wept and wept, so that she did not dare show her face for days. . . .

"What are you thinking of, dearie? . . ." Mademoiselle Villetard inquired, as she came outside and noticed the dark deep line between Jozette's downcast eyes.

"I . . . was thinking of my father," said the girl, taken unawares.

"Is your father still alive?"

"No," said Jozette, "he died four years ago."

"And your mother?"

"I never knew her."

"What about your other relations, then?"

"I have no other relations."

Mademoiselle Villetard sighed; as long as they talked of flowers and the street, her present pleasant rooms and her former pleasant life with her pupils, it was rather jolly; but whenever she touched on anything personal to Jozette, the girl's sullenness immediately disheartened her.

And at the same time, the expression in Jozette's eyes would be so strangely appealing and nervous that the little old woman felt ashamed at having caused her vexation.

"Don't you think this is a pretty picture?" she said two minutes later, coming out on the balcony and holding up a photograph for Jozette to see. Then she started to brush small garments across the railing, relating, in the meantime, an anecdote about one of her pupil's children. Jozette, still a little absent-minded, held the photo in her hand, hesitatingly.

But a few days later the ice was broken. Mademoiselle Villetard arrived home one morning from her daily marketing, with bright red cheeks. She had bought as a bargain a large basket of not very fresh strawberries . . . but splendid for jam, the saleswoman had said . . . they were offered at half-price, and she had closed the deal. But, on coming home, she was rather agitated as to how she was going to make the jam.

"Dearie," she said to Jozette, who, sitting on the balcony, was darning a black and purple-striped stocking with great care, "will you help me?"

It was the first time that she had ever asked her to do anything, and Jozette was pleased.

Mademoiselle Villetard's scrupulous refusal to all her offers of help had often hurt her.

With the basket and two dishes between them, the fruit was soon picked; then Mademoiselle was going to wash them.

"By the way, my child, I don't suppose you know how jam is made?" the little old lady inquired.

"I have often made it," said Jozette, a trifle nettled; she thought her capability was being underrated and it never occurred to her that the other one asked because she did not know herself.

She saw little Mademoiselle Villetard in her grey cotton morning-dress, her white hair somewhat disordered above her flushed red cheeks, nervously fidgeting about the room, finally place the fruit in a pan with a good deal of water and put it on the gas.

"That is not the way, it will never do like that," Jozette suddenly exclaimed.

"Oh!" said the old woman, very much startled, and she hastily took the pan from the flame and put it on the gas-stove. Then she looked at Jozette with round eyes full of despair.

"Do you know how it is done, dearie?" she said again. Jozette's face broke into its sunniest smile. She had already sprung to her feet and taken in the preparations for the jam-making at a glance . . . then she offered to do the whole thing.

Very deftly the little scene was enacted. The fruit was taken out of the water and left to drain; some fresh water was put in the pan, and placed on the gas. Jozette's hands moved quickly, full of decision; Mademoiselle Villetard looked on, her body twisting nervously as if suddenly her help might be needed.

She must have some scales, Jozette said; the fruit must

be weighed. . . . Did Mademoiselle not possess any scales? What about the neighbours? Madame Giraud? . . . then off to the balcony in her eagerness, addressing for the first time the rather standoffish Madame Giraud.

"For Mademoiselle Villetard . . . just a moment . . . only for a few minutes . . . the scales. . . ."

Madame Giraud did not look pleasant, but she went for the scales and handed them to Jozette across the balcony railing.

"Merci . . . merci!" said Jozette . . . she was full of enthusiasm for the success of her cooking.

"So . . . now the fruit must be weighed . . . on the strainer . . . now the fruit in a dish . . . then weigh the strainer and deduct this . . . like this . . . and then you must weigh exactly the same amount of sugar . . . and the sugar you boil into a syrup with the hot water . . . a nice thick syrup. . . ."

Mademoiselle Villetard stood looking on in silence and rapt admiration.

"And now the strawberries must be put into the syrup. . . ." Yes, that was right, she could see that. . . .

"Like this . . . and now it must be well stirred. . . ." said Jozette after a bit.

She gazed intently at the pan with its bubbling contents . . . in one hand she held the large enamel spoon and stirred steadily, with the other she turned the brass tap down, raised it again and then once more lowered the gently hissing flame. . . .

"There . . . that's it," she said at last with a deep sigh of satisfaction, and with a pop the gas-cooker went out.

Ladleing it up with the enamel spoon, she let the sweet-smelling pink rivulets with the bits of whole strawberry flow into the slightly darker little red pond.

"Lovely! . . . lovely," said Mademoiselle Villetard.

Jozette placed the pan in a basin of water to cool. The

jars were all ready . . . now she must have the papers dipped in brandy . . . and some parchment to cover them up, Jozette said. Had Mademoiselle any eau de vie? . . . She could get a little out of their own bottle . . . also a little parchment. . . .

When she came back, Mademoiselle Villetard filled the glasses and Jozette cut out the rounds of paper and dipped them in the brandy. By half-past eleven, the eight jars were finished and standing neat and rosy in a row in the cupboard.

In the second basket chair, the little old lady, dead tired with excitement, sat opposite Jozette on the balcony, trying to recover her breath. Jozette was also tired; she was not very strong as yet.

They sat there in pleasant intimacy, resting cosily in their wide chairs, looking at each other in great contentment; they handed each other the little flask of eau de cologne, bathing their hot foreheads with the cooling heat, sniffing the prickly scent.

"How clever you are, dearie," said Mademoiselle Villetard, full of admiration.

And a moment later, innocently, out of the fullness of this new-born intimacy:

"It is such a pity, my child, that you should lead such an irregular life."

She looked thoroughly scared after having said this, but Jozette was not angry, and answered very gently:

"I quite understand. . . . It must appear wrong to you, although it is not really very wrong. . . ."

"Oh, Jozette," said Mademoiselle Villetard, much relieved that she could speak openly for the first time, "you are leading such a sinful life, and I am so sorry, so very sorry. I have seen once more how capable you are . . . you would get on anywhere . . . you could earn your living anywhere . . . make yourself so useful. . . ."

"I am quite useful now," said Jozette modestly.

"Well, dearie," Mademoiselle Villetard said hesitatingly.

"Oh," said Jozette, more communicative than she had ever been, "you must not imagine that girls of our sort live like this out of laziness . . . respectable people sometimes think so . . . but I . . . How we become what we are, you must not ask . . . but later . . . I, at least . . . I don't mind any amount of work . . . or trouble . . . not at all . . . but do you know what it is? . . . I cannot work for myself. . . . You . . . you have always, all your life, worked hard, but you have, after all, done it for yourself alone. . . . I can only work for a man for whom I care . . . for myself"—she shrugged her slim shoulders nervously—"I must do it for a man . . . I do as much as I can for Aristide . . . and before that, too, when I was with Thierry. . . ."

"Oh! tut, tut, tut!" said Mademoiselle Villetard, alarmed.

"No . . . no . . . there is nothing disgraceful about it," Jozette continued, very excited by this time, "the first year with Thierry, I was only seventeen then . . . sometimes he wouldn't give me a penny for a whole week's food . . . he hadn't got it . . . he didn't sell very much then . . . but I managed somehow, I usually had saved something . . . I would pawn something which I could redeem the next month . . . and sometimes when he was late I would say that I had dined already and kept half the meal for the next day . . . there was not always plenty . . . I have starved for days at a time . . . just a little bit of bread . . . but he always had enough . . . so as to be able to work . . . he never knew much about poverty. I have never been able to do so much for Aristide . . . he did not want to go to the sort of a studio where I could wash and cook myself . . . I iron all our things . . . I make all my clothes . . . but here in this neat little room one cannot do much . . . but he does not have to spend much on me. And why do I tell you all this? . . . not to justify myself in your eyes, I

assure you . . . but you have been so sweet to me all these weeks. I don't want you to have too low an opinion of me . . . you must know that we are not really bad. . . ."

Mademoiselle Villetard leant back in her chair and looked at the girl intently, and rather baffled . . . she did not answer; then suddenly the anxious astonished expression on her face gave way to one of glowing affection . . . she nodded, touched, and vaguely pleased with a look that was full of understanding.

"Yes," she said gently.

All at once she got up, a little shy, and started tidying the room very quietly. . . .

Jozette went on gazing into space, without thinking much more; she felt a vague sense of shame about what she had said, but at the same time a slight sense of satisfaction.

And when, shortly afterwards, it was time to go and she said good-bye, she saw the little old face, still wonderfully moved, turn towards her.

"Good-bye . . . chérie!" said Mademoiselle Villetard.

"Bonjour, Mademoiselle!" said Jozette again. That was all they said, but, in the tone of their voices, there was a warmth of friendship which might last forever.

CHAPTER 6

I

MADAME LOURTY stood in her narrow kitchen and fried cutlets.

It was very hot there, swelteringly hot; the meat hissed and the penetrating heavy steam which would not escape through the two open chimney valves caught her throat. She listened for any sound from the direction of the front door, then opened the french window . . . after the steam had evaporated, she closed it cautiously, listening all the time.

"Etienne, do go and meet daddy . . . there's a dear," she called, putting her head round the dining-room door.

Etienne, small and pale like his mother, but with his father's bright blue, rather staring eyes, whined back a refusal. . . .

"No . . . no . . . it's so warm," and he went on sorting out his packets of picture post cards, which he had arranged beside his album on the white table-cloth.

Madame Lourty turned her three cutlets in the brown gravy . . . thank goodness, they were getting dark with crackling edges, such as Alphonse and Etienne liked . . . so that she could soon put a stop to that hissing noise. . . . She covered them with a brown earthenware cover and turned down the little gas-ring, then she set the front door ajar and once more opened the French window so as to allow the smoke to clear away. But it was rather draughty, she felt it because she was very hot after all the excitement, so she closed the window again, when the air had cleared. Then she finished her preparations for the midday meal, keeping

her eye constantly on the open front door and the corner of the landing which she could see with its bit of marbled back wall across which the shadow was cast of whoever went upstairs. . . .

A strong odour of onions and carrots floated across the landing into the apartment.

"Pff, what a smell," grumbled Etienne.

Madame Lourty was debating . . . should she shut the door again? . . . Alphonse hated these *pot-au-feu* smells, he had never been able to get used to the Parisian's plain fare, everlasting onions, neither could she . . . he would be in a bad temper if he found it smelt stuffy. . . . That Mademoiselle Antoinette poisoned the air in the whole house with her cooking . . . but if she closed the door, she would not be able to rest . . . she was sure to imagine every other minute that Alphonse was stealing upstairs again.

"Hurry up, my boy," she said sweetly, "tidy up your papers." She hoped that he would be willing to lay the table, so that she could continue her watching.

The child, however, turned a deaf ear, and went on in his deliberate way, dividing up the thick packets of post cards which he held in his hand, into many little piles: "grandes villes . . . costumes nationaux . . . stations balnéaires . . ." he said aloud repeatedly so as not to make a mistake; the parrot, his bent claws curled round the two sticks, climbed up the front of the cage, muttering incessant questions with his black-tongued beak.

Madame Lourty thought she would wait and lay the table after Alphonse arrived . . . she remained at her post . . . she *must* wait for him. . . . For the last few days she had been consumed with anxiety. . . . At first everything had gone well after they had returned from his brother's . . . the little trip, although short, had made him much calmer . . . he had been so normal there, as if nothing were the matter . . . and he was like that for a week after . . . but all at

once, a new attack . . . and once more the same girl! . . . and not to be able to say anything to that concierge . . . these people did not know what pity meant . . . to have a creature like that living above them! . . . this time it was worse than all the other occasions put together.

They had always been respectable women and girls, somehow in the neighbourhood . . . women, who, she knew, would not encourage a sick man's folly. But now, that common girl on the fifth floor . . . it was a repetition of the time a little more than a year after their marriage, when she was still in bed after her second miscarriage and Alphonse had run after a German slut who lived in their street at Lyon . . . even the doctors had told her that it was an illness . . . an illness . . . but no one would ever know what she had suffered on account of it.

And now again it was a *cocotte* . . . an artist's girl . . . she would not behave as if she did not notice anything . . . she would encourage him . . . get all she could . . . twist him round her little finger . . . go about with him. . . .

Twice that week when he was late and she went to look, she had seen him coming downstairs on tiptoe . . . what had he been up to there? . . . He said he had taken a message from the Town Hall to the Girauds . . . she knew better . . . it was not likely he would act as messenger for the Town Hall . . . he was so proud!

Oh, that dreadful spying, which she considered these days her duty, because it was so necessary. If only Etienne would help sometimes, and simply do as he was told . . . but she could not give the child a reason . . . tell him what was wrong with his father. . . .

So she just listened and waited, while two red spots appeared on her pale cheeks, under the tired grey eyes. . . .

"Etienne, put away your cards now," she said once more.

Her nerves were so much on edge that her hands trembled

uncertainly as she stirred the vegetables in the little pan over the bluish-yellow gas.

Then she heard a heavy footstep coming upstairs.

"Voilà, enfin . . ." she thought. Quickly she turned down the gas and went to the front door. . . .

It was Madame Carpentier.

"Oh!" said Madame Lourty.

The expression on the face of the concierge's wife became still more gloomy.

"Oui, oui, ma bonne dame," she began at once cantankerously, "I have come upstairs on purpose . . . the smell of your food penetrates to the loge. You must air your kitchen by the window and not by the front door. You should rent an hotel . . . then you could ventilate just as you please."

"Madame Carpentier," said Madame Lourty, "that smell does not come from my apartment."

"And from where does it come then?" the concierge inquired impudently, peering through the kitchen door at the gas-stove—"from where? . . . Which front door is open? Only this one, that settles it. . . . Your front door is not supposed to be open when you are cooking. . . . You are cooking . . . I see your pan with cutlets. . . . You have been frying cutlets. . . . The smell of fat is poisoning the whole house."

"Madame Carpentier," said Madame Lourty again, making strenuous efforts to control herself, but in a trembling voice, "that smell of cooking does not come from my apartment . . . it is Mademoiselle Antoinette's pot-au-feu . . . it is the smell of onions. I never use onions in my kitchen."

I should like to see that, I should."

The concierge's wife's large bulk loomed at the door.

"Madame," the little woman exclaimed, bristling up, "you must respect my house . . . you are going too far!"

"Your dinner would not get spoilt if I looked at it," the

concierge said a little more humbly, whining as if an injustice had been done her, but then, really venomously, "I don't need to see it, *ma bonne dame*. . . . I can smell the onions and the fat through this door . . . surely I must know what I smell."

Madame Lourty was just about to shut the front door when another gentler footstep was heard on the stairs creaking.

Good Heavens, there was Alphonse . . . now she must stay. . . . Madame Carpentier, looking round, also saw the new arrival, and wanting to start a scene with this quick-tempered man, she began again:

"Only *your* front door was open . . . why don't you shut it. . . . Where on earth can that dirty smell come from, except through the only front door which is open? Here, shut it. . . ." Madame Carpentier's plump hand made a grab at the brass knob in the middle of the door-panel.

"Alphonse, Alphonse!" cried Madame Lourty, seeing her husband trying to slip round the bend in the stairs. "Alphonse," she pleaded again.

The concierge's wife immediately changed her ground.

"Why is your husband going upstairs? What business has he to go up there?" . . .

"He has a message from the Town Hall for Monsieur Giraud," said Madame Lourty calmly, though her lips quivered. Suddenly she shut the door. Hot tears welled up in her eyes. But still listening, she heard Madame Carpentier follow her husband up the last flight. Goodness! What would happen? . . . What was she to do? . . .

Etienne, who had come quietly up, startled her. His staring blue eyes looked large and astonished, and he was as white as a sheet.

"Mother," he said.

"Come, my boy, tidy up your cards; it is nothing at all. Papa will see to the concierge; go and put on your jacket.

You know that papa won't have boys in shirt-sleeves at table." Once more she was standing on the landing, the door of the apartment closed behind her. . . .

"Plus tard, Madame!" she heard her husband snarl, above the reiterated impertinence of the concierge's wife; then she saw him come down the top stairs with suppressed agitation, afterwards slower behind the woman's skirts. Madame Lourty turned inside quickly, leaving the door ajar. . . .

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" she muttered and sank down on the kitchen chair.

Lourty, closing the door behind him, did not pay any attention to her and sat down at the dining-room table, with his hat on and his stick between his knees.

He remained there with a fixed stare, not noticing Etienne, who, opposite him, was putting away his picture post cards, his eyes looked like gloomy caverns beneath his knitted brows.

Madame Lourty roused herself. She drank a sip of water from the tap at the sink, and with a slight shudder of her thin shoulders, she mastered her nerves. She went in, gently took possession of Lourty's stick and his hat, put them in the little entrance hall, vanished for one moment into the bedroom, then she returned and poured some lavender water on a clean handkerchief and bathed his burning forehead.

"I expect you are hungry, Alphonse!" she said cheerfully . . . there are cutlets and French beans. . . ."

"Was that woman bothering you?" he asked dully, as if only half-conscious of what he was saying.

"No, no," said Madame Lourty soothingly . . . "it was nothing."

When, later, they sat down to table they were almost a happy family, the talk at the carefully laid table was so peaceful and quiet. The little woman was full of innumerable trifling attentions, her tact always found a subject which both the child and the man could enjoy, restor-

ing, in this manner, a joyous spirit to their little circle. This quiet half-hour at dinner, when there were no disagreements and they laughed and enjoyed their food, filled her with gratitude for the moment, and she was able to say the sweetest things with a depth of conviction.

But sometimes, when at the same instant, from either side of the table, she heard the same excited laugh, saw the same glowing blue eyes of father and son fixed upon her, she would suddenly feel a cold shudder down her spine . . . it seemed to her that an empty and disillusioned past and a distant threatening future held her as if in a vice of terror.

II

"Bonjour, Cholotte . . . Bonjour, Cholotte!" the bird had been crying for a quarter of an hour in the corner of his cage; after every five or six cries—indistinct cries, because, nowadays he was left to himself a good deal and soon forgot—he raised his tufted head with little balls of sand on the feathers, to the height of the wooden framework and squinted with his round red-rimmed eye between two copper bars; then, when he saw that no one was noticing him, with a foolish wink, he raised the grey dry leathery sole of his lower eyelid, winked again, and bending his head once more inside the cage: "Bonjour, Cholotte. . . ."

Very quietly, her black eyes large and sad beneath her careworn brow, Jeanne did her work in the little kitchen.

An oppressive sense of melancholy seemed to permeate the apartment. "Monsieur is ill again," Madame had said as she came in and this was not at all unusual, only she sounded so terrified . . . and hurried back to the little drawing-room, closing the door behind her; she was still there, only once she had gone hurriedly in and out of the bedroom—nothing but the parrot's fretful nasal soliloquy broke the tense si-

lence: "Bonjour, Cholotte . . . bonjour, Cholotte"; like a sinister foreboding, the smell of velerian penetrated through the bedroom door.

All at once Jeanne stopped working.

"Sut! Coco . . ." she called to the bird; she thought she heard something . . . rather like stifled sobs coming from the front . . . she listened again in the entrance hall. . . . Oh, God! Yes, Madame was weeping . . . a feeling of anxiety gripped at her heart. And the stifled sobs continued . . . this could not go on . . . she must do something.

She tapped gently . . . when she found there was no reply, she opened the door cautiously and peeped in.

At the creaking of the hinges, the little woman sprang up from the sofa corner, where she had thrown herself down to cry, but, ashamed of her tear-stained face, she sank back again, covering her head with her arms.

Then as the bird's rasping cries were heard once more in the next room, her limbs were seized with a nervous trembling. . . . "Oh, be quiet, be quiet, be quiet!" she implored, her voice almost hysterical.

Jeanne was scared . . . what was that? Madame never behaved like that, and how ill she looked . . . so strangely drawn and pale! . . .

The parrot screeched away, scratching against the copper bars.

With an angry jerk Jeanne opened the door, unfastened her apron, threw it over the cage; then she hurried to the sideboard and mixed a little wine and water.

"Have a drink," she said; she was so upset herself, that the glass trembled in her hand.

Madame Lourty drank a few sips which gurgled in her throat between two sobs, then threw her head back as though warding off a blow. She sat for a moment with closed eyes

and sighed deeply as if relieved that the bird's cries had been silenced at last. . . . Then she turned her tired red eyes towards Jeanne:

"When he cries like that . . . the last few days . . . I always hear *cocotte, cocotte*," she said in a husky whisper, with a desperate sound in that "*cocotte*"—"I simply can't listen to it any longer, Jeanne!"

Pathetically helpless, because she did not understand, Jeanne looked at her . . . what was it? what did Madame want? . . . "Oh, *la pauvre!*" she thought all at once, "Oh, *la pauvre!*" . . .

The little woman had closed her eyes again. . . . One long loose lock had strayed from her mouse-coloured hair which was beginning to turn grey; it lay like a transparent shadow across the blue-veined hollow temple and against the taut paleness of the small cheek; as she moved her head, one or two shining strands got loose and trembled over the reddened eyelid, between the dewy eyelashes.

With a gesture of infinite tenderness, Jeanne bent over her, and very gently, as if she were touching something holy, her hand smoothed away the troublesome look from eyes and face. It was the first time that she had ever touched Madame Lourty's face. There was a wonderful depth of kindness and understanding in her own eyes. And the little woman, as if to say how nice it was, drew her own hand gently and slowly over the hair which had been brushed back.

"I couldn't help it, Jeanne," she said, "I have never suffered so much as the last few days . . . it was too much for me . . . this morning . . . I could not keep on any longer . . . and then the parrot. . . ."

"Does Madame mean that girl upstairs?" Jeanne ventured; Madame Lourty nodded assent between the tears which welled up again into her eyes.

"Madame must not look too much at the black side," she

said, "the girl is not so bad as Madame thinks . . . they say she is a good girl."

Madame Lourty looked up in great surprise, not because Jeanne betrayed suddenly that she knew, but because of what she said about the other one. She gazed with anxious questioning into those calm trustworthy eyes above her; but then with a short and violent shake of the head, she said vehemently:

"She is a bad girl."

Jeanne shook her head thoughtfully.

Madame Lourty had never made any allusion to Jozette, but Jeanne had once seen Lourty in the street, with his odd strained face, walking behind the two artists and the girl; then she had understood and made some inquiries.

"The girl is ill at this moment, Madame," she said, "and upstairs there is an old lady, a dear good woman, a virtuous woman . . . who looks after her and she would not do that if the girl were not respectable. . . . I know it from Madame Leguënne, and Madame Leguënne has it from the loge."

"A little old lady with a black lace coat?" asked Madame Lourty; she had seen her pass the front door on her way upstairs.

Jeanne shrugged her shoulders; she did not know. She had told all she knew. . . . Doctor Valency had never mentioned his visits.

Madame Lourty looked thoughtful. Jeanne's quiet convincing voice had calmed her instantly.

From the bedroom came the tinkle of the little bell which Lourty had beside his bed.

"Oh, voilà!" the little woman exclaimed; she hurriedly smoothed her crumpled blouse and dried her eyes before she went into the sick-room.

"I shall have to go to the Town Hall," she said. When a little later, very simple and neat in her navy-blue foulard

dress which she had made herself years ago, and her rather lighter blue toque, she came into the entrance hall, the reddened eyelids lightly powdered, and her face once more so quiet and contented, though, perhaps, a shade paler than usual, then Jeanne felt a lump in her throat.

As soon as she had gone, Jeanne went to fetch the bird's cage out of the dining-room. That was the only thing that she could do for Madame—to teach the parrot his words better, so that he could no longer be misunderstood.

"Coco has been badly treated lately," she comforted the bird good-naturedly, "People have only said 'Be quiet, Coco!' they have not talked to him . . . of course Coco forgets his pretty words. . . . And with inexhaustible patience, whilst her hands moved feverishly trying to finish the work which was behindhand, she twisted her lips and her tongue and said as clearly and distinctly as she could manage her "Bonjour, Charlotte." And the bird, glad of this new companionship, perched up on the kitchen dresser did not tire of the lesson as he watched Jeanne's frenzied work with his inquisitive eyes.

"Bonjour, Charlotte! bonjour, Charlotte!" he chanted at the bottom of the cage, flapping his tail spread out like a fan in a self-satisfied accompaniment.

"Bonjour, Charlotte! bonjour, Charlotte!" He clutched the bars with his ringed black claws, and after every cry he whetted his beak with angry vehemence on the metal.

Then he sat up straight in the middle of the upper perch, all his feathers flat against his body, and his round red-rimmed eyes peering fixedly on either side of his head; the crooked horny beak remained motionless, but underneath, something black moved mechanically backwards and forwards.

"Bonjour, Charlotte . . . bonjour, Charlotte. . . ."

A few mornings later, Jeanne brought further news; the

day before, crossing the road from the grocer where she had been for Madame Dutoit, she had seen on the balcony of the house the girl and the old lady sitting close together, opposite each other with a basket on their knees, but she was not sure what they were doing . . . and Gabrielle had told her that the little old lady was called Mademoiselle Villetard, and she had been a governess.

"Madame voit!" said Jeanne triumphantly, glad of anything she could say by the way of reassurance.

Madame Lourty went on quietly with her work. She was rather ashamed of her violent indignation and her wicked accusations; she had been mistaken . . . but after all there were girls who without meaning anything . . .

She felt less nervous too. The doctor had written a certificate, Alphonse must have a week's rest . . . she had gone with it to the Town Hall for the second time, and they had been particularly kind to her.

With the most tender care she prepared the mixture of mince and breadcrumbs with which she was going to stuff the tomatoes. Alphonse was so fond of them when he was ill . . . they could not really afford it, but Etienne and she had good digestions and she decided that for a day or two their dinner should consist of good barley soup. Oh! the relief, to know that Alphonse was safely at home . . . no spying, no anxiety about his coming in late. . . . And if Jeanne should be right and that girl was a good girl who did not want her husband or his money . . . her wretched scanty supply of money, which she needed so badly for everything, for the rent, for Etienne's schooling, for the doctor's bill! . . .

Jeanne who made the most careful inquiries wherever she had the chance, came the next morning, with a fresh tale . . . the girl was very ill; the two artists shared the nursing and Doctor Valency was called in . . . Julie had told her and that

morning she had asked him herself ; yes, the girl had been under treatment with him, she was a good soul, he had said.

The two women looked at each other with long, wavering, questioning glances. . . .

"Is she still ill?" Madame Lourty inquired.

"I believe so," said Jeanne.

The little woman felt a sweet wave of pity, as well as a bitter feeling at having been disagreeable and petty.

"Bonjour, Charlotte! bonjour, Charlotte!" screamed the parrot clearly, pressed gracefully against the bars of the cage.

"He articulates just like an actor at the Théâtre Français!" She smiled gratefully at Jeanne, who did not quite understand this. Then she thought over what Jeanne had said the day before: "Madame ought to have a chat with the girl some day."

And all at once she became sad and gentle ; there was so much sadness in life, which no one could help . . . oh ! why could not people be kinder to one another . . . why did they purposely cause each other so much trouble and sorrow?

"Jeanne," Madame Lourty announced, "I am going to look up that girl." And then, with childlike simplicity, they decided that Madame Lourty should carry the parrot in his cage upstairs, to amuse the invalid. . . . Jeanne ran at once into the dining-room to see if the cage were not too heavy for Madame.

"Rather heavy," she thought, but she preferred to carry it herself ; it seemed to her to be something of a penance for her wicked thoughts.

They looked into the garden ; the boys were working there, the girl was alone ; they listened on the landing ; Madame Carpentier's voice reached them from the very depths of the staircase.

Then the little woman took the cage by its brass ring so that the bottom rim should not bump against the steps, and

with her other hand picking up her skirts so as to avoid stumbling, she began the wearisome journey upstairs.

She stopped for a moment on the little landing, resting the cage on the floor, and in spite of her panting she looked around as if she were very happy, with a little laugh at Jeanne, who, standing at the front door with great trepidation and joy, took an almost personal part in each of her movements; her little figure, swaying and panting and laughing, was silhouetted against the window, and her silvery fair hair seemed to form an aureole round her dark pale face.

The bird, in the corner of his cage, rocked gently on his wooden perch, turning his head from left to right with delighted curiosity to see all the strange happenings about him.

When Jeanne, frightened of being caught, motioned her to hurry, the little woman lifted her burden again and climbed the second staircase; then she made her way into the dark hall.

She heard that Jeanne had not yet closed the front door, and so, knowing that she was waiting for her downstairs, she laughed again, a low laugh, full of affection. Just for a moment she had to find her bearing in the little passage, where she had never been before, but knowing that the girl had the corner room at the back, she soon found her way.

She tapped, tapped, and yet again; her arm, tingling with fatigue, let the cage sink on to the floor. A dull guttural sound came from the bird, somewhat frightened in the dark.

She knocked a little louder; Coco's gurgles became more anxious still. Take care, he must not lose his temper . . . gently she opened the door . . . there was no one. She took two steps inside the room. And with a violent start she suddenly saw above the couch, in the glaring sunlight streaming through the open window, the pale nude female form with the shimmering grass-green handbag.

A feeling of violent disgust came over her.

That was the girl . . . that girl . . . she thought in a fit of anger. She cast one hurried glance round the room; nothing but that couch and that gaudy curtain against which she reclined in the painting, stark naked. . . . "A bad girl after all," she said aloud, shivering. She turned and pulled the door to behind her. And carrying with difficulty the frightened muttering bird, she went through the little hall down the stairs.

At the front door, her face still elated, stood Jeanne.

"Oh!" she said, startled, conscious of bitter disappointment when Madame returned unexpectedly, her gentle face hard and bitter.

"There was no one there," was all Madame Lourty remarked stiffly, and she went straight through with the bird-cage into the dining-room.

Neither of the two women mentioned the incident again that morning.

But the parrot, breathing freely again, hopped merrily from perch to perch, and cheerfully, and more distinctly than ever, his cries echoed through the stuffy dreary apartment, "Bonjour, Charlotte! bonjour Char-r-lotte."

CHAPTER 7

"**C'**EST ça . . . vous revoilà! . . ." the astonished little Dr. Valency said, when, on coming into the loge early one evening in August, he found Madame Leguënné alone, sitting in the arm-chair at the open window, acting concierge. He had evolved an elaborate theory on the subject of the woman's illness and called her a hereditary hysterical dyspeptic, and by way of scientific amusement, he made use of each meeting to confirm his somewhat romantic diagnosis.

"Still on a milk diet?" he inquired, eyeing her sharply.

The peaceful vacant expression in the doe-like eyes grew vaguer and melted away, languishing as if overwhelmed with gratitude; her head, resting on her left shoulder, tilted towards the questioner, and she gazed beyond him as if in a sudden ecstasy. Then, closing her heavy eyelids, she twisted her fingers nervously in her lap, and she drew her pale lips into the naïvely shy smile of a child who has been found out in some misdemeanour.

"I sometimes eat a cutlet now . . . and some paté . . . and a few radishes. . . ."

"Radishes?" Dr. Valency inquired—did they suit her?

She nodded, sentimentally apologetic, and fixed her eyes, large and pitiful, on the corner of the room.

Dr. Valency smiled in a self-satisfied manner under his little black moustache as if he knew all about it; exaggerated facial expression, auto-suggestion, it all tallied.

Then he laughed when he saw the creature still counting the flies on the wall and he gave his instructions: if there were a message from the laboratory . . . if they sent for him from the hospital. . . .

"Ah! oui oui!" said Madame Leguënne with a sudden empty-headed solemnity, her mouth drawn, her cheeks wrinkled, and her eyes wide with terror, deep and black; "oui! oui!"

Monsieur le Docteur could count on her.

And the doctor departed.

On that fine evening it seemed as though all the inmates of the house were going to march past the loge; Madame Giraud and her little boy went out, Monsieur Herz and Madame Bertin and Mademoiselle Villetard; they bowed in passing or, poking their heads around the door, said a few words about a latchkey or a parcel which would be left. . . .

Madame Leguënne, leaning forward in her chair, returned the greetings, sweetly languishing, or listened and answered with long pining glances as if she were apologizing for being there at all.

That morning she had gone to the Avenue Victoria and paid off two francs! . . . in her gala clothes as Leguënne called them . . . she had twenty-seven francs left downstairs! . . .

What a load off her mind after that week of anxiety in the beginning of July, the note from M. Morland; she had managed to put things right for her, her fine had been reduced to three hundred francs and she was allowed to pay as often as she liked and whenever her circumstances permitted it . . . what a load off her mind! But at the same time, how very sorry she was about that hundred francs which she had borrowed at the last moment and which just the day before had been taken with Leguënne's twenty-five francs to the office!

Since then she had been twice to pay off a little, a franc or two . . . when, for the second time she had stayed away for over three weeks, a warning had arrived, that was all! The affair was now proceeding very peacefully.

It was the other hundred francs from the Rue Réaumur,

which was causing her most anxiety . . . why on earth had she in her fright borrowed them? It was a blessing in disguise that she had not been able to get more than a hundred francs! All the same—to pay off seven-francs-fifty every fortnight, and that for nearly a year! *Enfin*, towards the time that the little man was due with his receipt, every other Tuesday, she would hide away everything that looked at all respectable, and in her “gala-clothes,” in other words, her oldest cast-offs, she would take up her position in the room, where another farce would be enacted. Leguënne had not put in an appearance since Sunday. On Wednesday he would probably turn up again . . . he refused, he always said, to be at home on “mardigras.”

But, up till now, the little game had always been successful. The old man who was sent, felt sorry for her, she noticed, and she had always got off with two or three francs . . . he put things right for her at the office, and for another fortnight she was free. . . . All this was not as it should be and she did not like the idea of the interest which would be charged . . . but, sufficient unto the day, and she was not going to worry.

She sat there contentedly dreaming away. . . .

“Bonsoir, ma belle!” sounded a deep guttural voice, close to the open window, and two arms, covered to the elbow in white linen sleeves, spread themselves over the windowsill. It was the *crêmière* from the second little shop in the house next door. Madame Leguënne started up and then smiled in a shy ingratiating manner, knowing quite well that she was looking her best that day. Behind her half-closed eyelids the pupils fluttered upwards; “Oh no, she was no longer handsome!” her face said.

Then she glanced up with a languishing air and looked at the well-nourished *crêmière* and smiled with coquettish self-depreciation.

“Thin . . .” she said, “nothing but skin and bone . . .

just feel . . .” and she stuck out her flat brown hard wrist, from out of the fawn-coloured sleeve, at the other woman.

She, lolling snug and lazy, did not move her rosy milk-soft hands, folding them across each other on the brown ridge of the window-sill.

“Possibly,” she said with a cursory glance at the slender fingers raised to her face—she might be a little thin, all the same, she had been looking remarkably well of late.

Madame Leguënné pulled back her arm with coy deliberation, gave a little shy demure smile and unravelled the fringe of her silk tie.

The dairy-woman gazed pensively into space for a moment. “And for when, the cock?” she asked with a sudden burst of cheerfulness, leaning across the window-sill again with the same pushing confidential manner.

Madame Leguënné smiled a vague sphinx-like smile. She thought of the twenty-seven francs which she had saved, lying on the shelf downstairs beside her underlinen. She had just been to the Avenue Victoria, she would manage to pacify the old man to-morrow with three francs. . . .

She sat up in her chair with a little movement of her body; she looked down with a shy coaxing air, conscious that she was about to strike the bargain, and half ashamed at the luxury which she was going to permit herself. Then her eyes lighted up, but she restrained her eagerness and the expression on her face was once more as if asking for pity.

A woman situated as she was who had to support herself entirely! . . . Leguënné paid the rent, but that was all . . . and if he remained to dinner, he would not even fork out a franc . . . she lost over it . . . she would rather see his back than his face! But that cock, if she could get it cheap . . . she had set her heart on having one for such a long time! A sturdy cock who would get on well with his hens, and who thought nothing of a few dozen chickens more or less. . . .

She said this with her queer coquettish look and a timid sidelong glance.

"Old! as to that, a beauty . . . a magnificent cock!" said the dairy-woman, "as chivalrous as a knight of old . . . and healthy . . . blood-red gills which flapped as he walked and hung like a beard upon his breast! . . . Yesterday they had been to Nanterre; the farmer there, their boss, was in the habit of asking them there on Sundays . . . a wonderful sight that farm. And there he strutted about the farm-yard . . . it was a pleasure to see him, spurs like a cuirassier and a beak like a hawk in the Jardin des Plantes . . . and eyes! . . . pardi! you got shy when he looked at you!"

"No," she forestalled Madame Leguënne, who wanted to say something—"the black and white one was no longer for sale." She should have been more on the spot if she wanted that one; but this one was just as good, and if you came to think of it, he matched her hens even better.

Then after a tensely eager question from the other woman, the dairy-woman who enjoyed showing off her famous eloquence, gave another description of the animal's bearing; his neck all gold and green, and his wings looked as if he were striking sparks when he walked in the sun, copper and yellow . . . the fiery comb stood on his head like a flame, and his tail! Good Heavens, what a tail! when the King of England was in Paris, he had no finer feathers in his hat! feathers as long as her arm and black as jet and so shiny as if they had been dusted with powder of gold. . . .

"Five francs? . . ." inquired Madame Leguënne sweetly and with languid eyes, full of expectation.

"No, six francs," said the *crêmière*, always wideawake when doing a deal, "six francs, not a sou less, and fifty centimes for the trouble of bringing it, voilà!"

Madame Leguënne, with downcast eyes, gazed crestfallen into her lap, where her intertwined fingers twisted nervously in and out of each other; then she glanced pathetically to-

wards the corner of the room; she still hoped to get him cheaper.

From the distant street, in the evening stillness, sounded quick sharp footsteps on the asphalt; it was a sound for which she had to listen; a moment later, behind the dairy-woman, appeared a short old man who gazed sharply and astonished into the loge window.

Madame Leguënne, with a startled jump, threw herself back in her chair.

"To-morrow! . . . to-morrow!" she said hastily, with dramatic insistence, motioning the dairy-woman to go.

The latter, rather taken aback, wished to know if it was all settled. . . .

"To-morrow! . . . to-morrow! . . ." Madame Leguënne urged again with a note of pleading insistence in her voice. She got up quickly and shut the window.

Madame Leguënne, clutching the table with one hand, the other painfully pressed to her side, adopted her favourite pose of a dying woman.

The little man ran clumsily into her; for one moment he glanced with insolent astonishment at the woman by the table. . . .

"C'est ça . . . vous voilà, concierge . . . on aura au moins son argent!" he snarled sarcastically, with his small head thrust furiously towards her. The small pale eyes, half closed and short-sighted under whitish brows, gazed sardonically from amongst the deep wrinkles.

Madame Leguënne had fallen back against the rim of her chair, a look of dazed confusion came into her wide staring eyes; he had never yet treated her in this fashion . . . he had always been sorry for her . . . and what on earth was he coming to do in the evening? She was overcome with a mad fear of impending disaster.

She rose again . . . then she suddenly remembered that she was looking very trim and neat . . . handsome, even

. . . she tried sweetly to catch his eye, but no sooner had his glance met hers, that pair of watery gleaming slits, inspecting her from top to toe, then her eyelids drooped heavily and her lips trembled.

She pressed both hands to her chest as if in agony, and tried to regain her languid attitude of utter feebleness. Then she caught sight of her brand-new blouse, the cheerful touch of red at her wrists and the red tie under her face. . . .

"Çà . . . çà . . . ma petite dame!" croaked the little man, making funny little bows from the waist downwards; his unshaven grey-whiskered cheeks twitched nervously from the corners of the mouth to the eyes, and he hunched up his shoulders in the shabby overcoat which he wore, as if feeling cold.

"Very nice . . . most smart," he jeered, "pimpante, coquette! Et la santé de Madame?" he asked with a grin.

Then he changed his tune again, and spoke to her roughly. She need not stand there like a dummy; surely she knew why he had come? She might hurry up and show the colour of her money . . . that is to say, if she had not used it all to adorn herself.

Madame Leguënné, with a sudden wave of understanding, realized that she could not remain there with that man, but neither did she know how to get him downstairs, she knew nothing, she felt completely dazed.

Then, not quite knowing what she did, she hurried out of the loge, rushed through the hall, down the stairs to her basement. The little man, swearing inwardly, followed her.

When Madame Leguënné had reached the low hall with the bare walls, where, at the one end, the entrance to the garden gave a little light, and at the other the two paintless doors showed, the one leading to the large cellars of the house, the other belonging to her apartment—then she suddenly felt that she was once more in her atmosphere of tragic pitifulness.

"Une pauvre femme comme moi!" she said with a moan, full of bitter reproach. She was silent for a moment and glanced over her shoulder . . . her eyes melting as if to implore justice from heaven: "pauvre et malade . . . très malade! . . ." then she looked right round and saw the old man's almost malevolent face; her eyes wavered, she felt as if she were naked and ashamed in her smart clothes. . . .

She unlocked the door.

"Well, well!" said the little man when he was inside. He had never seen the rooms otherwise than with shutters closed over curtainless windows so that the half-empty and low-ceilinged narrow rooms looked dreary, unlivable, and damp; now the scented summer-evening air was wafted in through the wide-open window and everything looked nice and pleasant to the eye. In front of the window, with a cheerful industrious air, between chairs and piles of white materials, gleamed the large treadle-machine; and on the table stood the remains of a meal, a little pan with dripping and carrots, a plate with two picked bones, a wineglass, half full, and a pot of jam; through the half-closed door the bed in the next room could be seen . . . by no means the usual poor-looking bed—a nicely made and well-cared-for bed, with two downy comfortable pillows with large embroidered initials in the corner and covered with a pretty counterpane made of coloured bits of silk and strips of lace.

The little man with the eye of a valuator quickly took in the first room, then impudently pushed the door farther open and marched up to the bed.

Madame Leguëne crept nearer, and with a pathetic little laugh, lifting a corner of the counterpane up, "all old rags," she said, "from the customers . . . all rags." For a moment the wide opulent-looking bed caused the little man some inward merriment; he glanced at the woman out of the corner of his eye, as if measuring her thinness.

But then, really indignant, he burst forth—was she not

ashamed? dressed like that, meat and jam on the table, sleeping under lace and silk, and an old man such as he, could he walked off his legs in order to get a few francs out of her . . . but if she thought that he was going to be made a fool of any longer . . . he turned round sharply, went into the other room, and with a jerk of his bony hand he placed a number of papers on the table beside the jam-pot and the plate of bones. "Voilà," he said.

At other times he had always been helpful with explanations and arrangements; he had shown her where the amount was written and the signature and what the numbers meant. Now he remained sullenly where he was at one end of the table as if he had no intention of saying another word before he had the money in his hands.

Madame Leguënné came hesitatingly nearer; she never quite understood about the terms and for weeks past she would not have been able to state how much she had paid and how much she still owed; she only knew that there were always more extra charges and interest calculations with regard to the remaining debt, elaborate accounts of which she understood nothing—and that was making very little headway.

With a troubled expression she studied the papers, then eyeing the man like a wounded deer, she inquired in a toneless tragic voice: "Combien?"

She had only one longing; to be standing there in her grey morning-jacket, chilly in her old black shawl so as to be able to ward off this terrible thing with pathos.

She pressed her hand to her side as if to stifle an unbearable pain, and coughed with a hollow sound.

"Combien?" sneered the man at last; "Combien?" he mimicked her once more. . . . *Sacre Dieu!* as much as she could afford! All the time his half closed eyes were staring fixedly at the shining buckle of her belt and the two rings on her finger.

Feeling giddy and completely blank, Madame Leguënné went to the wall cupboard and took a box from behind the pile of underclothing . . . her pleasant life of the last few weeks, her great longing for the cock, everything was blotted out, and half stupefied, she emptied the contents of the box on to the table beside the papers; five five-franc pieces and two odd francs.

When she saw her silver glistening there on the table, a silly smile of expectation crept over her face. She looked at the man.

He had suddenly become red with anger.

"Sacré nom de Dieu!" he roared while he searched through the papers. Had he not pleaded like an idiot at the office when he returned with two or three francs . . . and there! there! Madame had had the money tucked away behind her chemises! Yes, indeed! But he would warn them! He knew now how to deal with her!

With sharp scratching strokes, he filled in the two receipts, gathered up the money and put it loose into his pocket, returned a copper coin, and then without saying good-bye, he turned round and closed the door with a bang.

For one moment Madame Leguënné remained standing in the middle of the room as if dazed; there was a franc on the table, a sou in her hand.

When Louis the lodger came home at a quarter to seven he found no one but Monsieur Herz in the loge. On the chair beside the bed, in his blue-grey overcoat, which lent a sort of muddy pallor to his face, with its faded auburn moustache, and little pointed beard, Monsieur Herz sat and waited patiently.

Louis, his cap over one ear, greeted him shyly.

"Is Madame Carpentier not in?" he inquired.

"I was just going to ask you the same thing," Monsieur Herz said cautiously.

"What!" . . . Louis remarked, rather surprised.

"Perhaps she has gone to the Rue Bréa," he suggested a little later, as he subsided opposite Herz, beside the wardrobe; "she often goes there, her daughter-in-law is expecting a baby."

He was much embarrassed as he said it, as if it were his fault, and laughed rather stupidly.

Herz looked good-natured. "She will come soon," he said.

Silently they sat facing each other.

From the apartment, next door, belonging to Madame Guillard sounded the subdued strains of a piano; a difficult accompaniment, which after stopping after the first few chords of the song, was begun afresh. Louis, his cap between his knees, nodded his somewhat sheepish face in time to the music.

When, just before seven o'clock, Madame Carpentier walked hurriedly past the window, they were still sitting there.

"Where is Madame Leguënné?" she asked Louis immediately, as she came in.

"How should I know?" said Louis. "I have not seen her."

"The loge was empty when I came in," Monsieur Herz added.

Madame Carpentier, bad-tempered and in a great state of excitement, threw the parcel which she had brought with her on to the table; so the loge had been empty! . . . a nice homecoming that was! . . . if Madame Leguënné had to go downstairs, surely she could lock up and hang up the notice-board? . . . Any one might walk in from the street . . . foolish creature who could not even be trusted alone for one afternoon. . . .

Only then did she look at Monsieur Herz, who had got up and was saying something again.

"Of course, it is most unpleasant," she said apologetically, "if you think that everything is all right and you come and

find that you have been let down. . . . After all there is not much trouble in hanging up a board and locking the door behind."

From the side of the wardrobe, where it was hanging on a nail, she took the card with its "La concierge est dans l'escalier" and flung it angrily across the table.

Then, somewhat calmer, she looked at Herz as if to ask what he wanted of her.

"I came to ask you. . . . I am going away next week, to Germany probably . . . will you please forward the letters which come for me to this address," and gave her a visiting card with "Saargemünd, poste restante." "Just hand them back to the postman . . . quite simple, isn't it? Madame Dutoit will not need to go to the pillar-box, and you will not have to go upstairs specially for me."

Madame Carpentier nodded, eyeing him suspiciously.

"I am just telling you that now," said Herz, talking kindly and in a low voice as if he were imparting a confidence, "then that is all arranged. . . . I may be going off early in the morning and then there will not be much time. . . ."

He said good-bye in his own particular, quiet, pleasant manner and departed.

Carpentier, at his supper, was overwhelmed with a series of passionate complaints about Madame Leguënne's carelessness.

But as she cleared away the things, Hortense suddenly had another idea; whispering, and with a sidelong glance at the door of the loge, she rambled on . . . and finally she remarked with a significant glance across her shoulder:

"You will see, Emile . . . she has been deserted; the lame duck; this time he will not come back. . . ."

CHAPTER 8

I

SEVERAL times already, Aristide had shifted uneasily on his high stool ; with careless accurate strokes he sketched the last convolvulus leaves in his almost completed drawing. From half-past seven in the morning he had hurried in order to finish his work in time. It was Tuesday, and before the end of the week everything must reach Roubaix.

"Bouboule, you disturb me," he said at last, and sat up very erect, his two hands placed deliberately on the edge of his easel, as if he were not intending to do another stroke until Célestin should stop moving backwards and forwards.

Célestin, who had finished the day before, had been wandering about the garden for the last half-hour ; squatting down behind the wire netting, he amused himself with the two neighbouring guinea-pigs which, every now and then, stuck their little, shy, trembling snouts from out the sandy hole under a plank. After that, he had carved his initials in a tree trunk behind the rustic summer-house, aimed bits of paper at Ninouche, who, with sensuous shivers down spine and tail, lay sleeping on the sunwarmed foliage of the Virginia creeper over the hen-house. In the intervals he came and peeped over Aristide's shoulder, and when finally he did not know what to do in the empty little garden, he took up his stance just behind him and stood whistling softly.

Aristide, with an upward glance of agonized impatience, sat up still straighter in an attitude of long-suffering disgust.

"Please, Bouboule . . ." he urged.

"Yes, yes, old boy, I am going, I am 'going . . ." said Célestin good-naturedly.

He picked up his cap which he had thrown into a corner of the summer-house, planted it firmly on his massive head, had another look to see if his finished work was quite safe in the long narrow box which had been made for both their rolls; he just glanced between the blotting-paper and paper at the corner of the drawing, winked at it; then strolled out of the garden.

"We'll meet in the evening," he said on reaching the gate. Aristide, with a sigh of relief, relaxed his erect position and waved back.

With deft fingers he strengthened the delicate outline on the shadow side of the dull green convolvulus leaf.

When the leaf was done he paused and his dreamy violet-grey eyes wandered over the quiet summer garden, and after a while the German professor came into the garden unexpectedly. Ever since he had once addressed Aristide on the subject of Jozette's illness, he had bowed courteously, with a broad smile to the two artists, standing at his window, whilst he had tried to see what they were actually working at and how they were getting on.

"Is it allowed?" he inquired, opening the gate cautiously as he approached on tiptoe. He was a slim man of medium height with a square-cut beard and glossy dark brown moustache and a broad pale face with regular features, always full of affability.

"Am I allowed to look?" Aristide in his well-bred but reserved manner had risen from his stool.

"Oh, certainly," he said, and with an inviting gesture from his drawing to the visitor, he stood aside, assuming an attitude of expectation, his head drooping, his hand stroking his little beard.

The German had stationed himself opposite the easel, his

arms on his back, feet close together; he gazed with half-closed eyes. . . .

"Very delightful . . . very beautiful . . . full of feeling," he remarked after a pause.

He went on looking and Aristide, smiling to himself, stood silently beside him. Then the man took one step forward, placed his finger on the paper scroll as if he wished to unwind it farther. . . . Aristide sprang to his assistance, not so much with a desire to help as out of anxiety for his work; he gave the paper a few turns.

"A mural decoration for a bathroom," he said by way of explanation.

The professor nodded; "full of feeling," he said again. He had always taken a particular interest in art, he told Aristide in his moderately good French; he had always been much attracted by the beautiful, he had several artist friends . . . and he also mentioned a few famous men of the German colony in Paris. . . .

Aristide's manner became a little more frankly pleasant.

"Is it not so?" said the professor in a modestly instructive voice, "a decoration must not exist for its own sake, it must be subject to the whole, it must also appeal to the soul . . . sweet and true to nature."—With a courteous gesture, he indicated Aristide's drawing. . . .

Aristide looked at his work with self-satisfaction, found there was some truth in what the German had said.

"All the same, French art is on the wrong track," the doctor asserted pleasantly in his professorial way. "What does one see at the Salons? . . . everything 'Palais de Versailles' or 'New Art' . . . everything Louis XV, Louis XVI, or . . . curving lines which are contrary to nature. . . ."

Their Ambassador's brother-in-law was now in treaty with a third decorator about his new house in the Avenue Fried-

land . . . no feeling . . . no inspiration . . . all imitation . . . he could not get on with any of the artists here.

"Really?" said Aristide, waking up.

He rolled up the sheet, then he went into the summer-house to fetch the pieces of the trestle-table at which they had worked and began to put it together. His agile and rather-exaggerated movements had the effect of making him look like a clown. Conscientiously he cleaned the boards with his handkerchief, spread some paper over them, then he unfolded the whole drawing.

Like this . . . like this, his meaning could be seen more clearly . . . the wide sweep of the lines, which was its principal feature.

He talked persuasively with boyish charm.

It was a drawing of about six feet long, graceful and almost too delicate in design, not very decorative, but with a wealth of detail, and possessing altogether a singularly ingenuous attraction.

The professor gazed attentively; he had again placed himself with feet close together and arms behind his back, facing the table. Aristide, from where he stood, simultaneously supporting and holding back the two curling corners, explained, indicating with his head . . . that slender horizontal design of winding convolvulus stalks came to the height of the dado; there, where it broadened out into bunches drooping on either side, that was over and round the bath; and that small dainty motive of tendrils, was for round the taps . . . everything half the size. . . .

"Exactly, exactly . . ." said the doctor with enthusiasm, "very pure . . . very full of feeling. . . ."

"And then," said Aristide eagerly, as he hurried to the summerhouse once more and brought back another thinner roll, smoothed it out across the table with a great deal of gesticulation . . . "under this narrow top border, the door . . ."

"Exactly . . . exactly . . ." repeated the doctor, restraining with difficulty his easy admiration . . . "very pretty . . . much poetical feeling. . . ."

"May I mention your name to our Ambassador's brother-in-law?" he said all at once.

Aristide's face and neck flushed a delicate red ; his shining eyes looked keen and clear. But he was able to control himself.

He had often heard, he said, as he carefully let the last sheet roll itself up, that the Germans were very artistic and had cultured taste, also that the big men were by way of being patrons of art . . . was there still much decoration to be done in that mansion? . . .

"A music-room among others and a billiard-room," said the professor.

Aristide became still redder.

"And your friend, what is he doing? . . . has his work been sent away?"

"No . . ." Aristide hesitated, "I believe it is all packed up. . . ."

"I am sorry," said the professor, "is it more or less in your style?"

"Yes . . . no . . ." Aristide hesitated again, "our ideas differ a little. . . ."

"Really . . ." said the other, "really . . . well, I might have thought so. . . ."

Then with much tact, Aristide succeeded in steering the conversation back to the Ambassador . . . without doubt, an artistic man, a patron of art . . . as for that mansion . . . a billiard-room . . . his eyes gazed into space, whilst his cheek twitched as if he were already seeking an inspiration. . . .

"Yes," said the German, "I believe at least that it has not yet been promised . . . but . . ." with a vague gesture he tried to close the conversation about his influential relations ;

he began to be afraid that he had promised too much.

"And should you think that the brother of the Ambassador might possibly like this design? . . ."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said the Professor hastily, "I shall be sure to mention your name. . . ."

"You are lucky to have this garden to work in," he said, laughing a trifle too genially, "enviable! Yes, art, it is a fine thing . . . and is your little wife getting on well? . . . I thought I saw you both pass by yesterday?"

"Oh, very well," said Aristide nervously polite and absent-minded.

"Well? work happily," the German smiled again and with a few courteous bows, stepping carefully, he went out of the garden.

II

That Tuesday, for the first time since Jozette's illness, the two artists and the girl had gone out together for the evening. Jozette, for whom the little party had been arranged, chose the "Noctambules," after a pleasant dinner outside on the Place St. Michel.

On the pavement, in front of the house, Célestin waited; that afternoon he had bought a new straw hat at an expensive shop on the Boul' Mich', a new white Panama hat with a wide brim in front and turned up at the back, and two shadowy dents in the high crown which were supposed to be caused by the squeeze of fingers after an elegant salutation. That hat should have been worn well over the eyes, but Célestin had it slightly to one side and well on the back of his head. It felt cool and light on his head, and accustomed to his velvet tam o' shanter it made him almost giddy; but at the same time he was shy about it. He knew that his big head looked more distinguished under it, but redder even

than usual; it made him uncertain and boyish in his manner of walking.

"Look! look!" said Jozette sweetly when she came out of the front door with Aristide; "just look at Bouboule!" She felt Célestin's kind intention in wearing that festive-looking hat in honour of her first outing and she wanted to tell him that it suited him and inquire interestedly where he had bought it, but Aristide began at once with suppressed excitement to tell about his morning's adventure.

"Oh . . . Bibi . . . he is full of his German professor . . ." Jozette laughed, slightly irritated. She had heard about nothing else that afternoon, and although pleased about this possible success, she felt a strange aversion to Aristide's high spirits.

"I wish you could have seen how full of enthusiasm he was," the latter told them as they hurried along . . . "he liked it better than anything he had seen at the Salon for years. . . . Just fancy, perhaps I shall have an entire billiard-room or a music-room to decorate. . . ."

"Sapristi!" said Célestin, much impressed. "What a pity he did not see my drawing as well. . . . You can never tell . . . after all, there are windows in a billiard-room. . . ."

He really meant this remark as a joke, and without thinking any more about it. Then, glancing to one side, he saw that Jozette was blushing and that she cast an upbraiding glance at Aristide.

"Did he not ask to see my sketches?" he asked, puzzled, because he felt that the other two were hiding something from him.

"No . . . he did not ask to see it," Aristide said evasively.

Jozette blushed a deeper red . . . that afternoon she had quarrelled with Aristide on this subject. . . . "Why did you not show him Bouboule's window?" she had said reproach-

fully, and Aristide had answered that the professor would not have cared for it anyhow, and that, as a matter of fact, he had not urged it. "You could have shown it him yourself," Jozette had maintained. "Why was he lying? . . . What did it mean? . . ."

All at once she became oppressed with a dread of life and a dread of so much that she did not understand in Aristide.

Célestin had cast another sidelong glance at Jozette; he had become very silent.

"Beauty . . . naturalism . . . poetical feeling, could nowadays be sought in vain in art"—Aristide continued—"of course a German expresses himself in rather a peculiar way . . . but still . . . that Ambassador's brother-in-law has already engaged a third decorator . . . none of them pleased him. . . ."

Then as they arrived at the Luxembourg, Aristide began to make fun of the episode, and stopping in the deserted dusky lane, he mimicked the German professor; he approached them cautiously with mincing footsteps, exaggerating the German's courteous gestures, saying in a pompous voice, "Am I allowed to look?" then standing with his feet close together and glancing arrogantly through his eyelashes. . . . "Very pretty . . . very delightful . . . full of feeling. . . ."

Jozette and Célestin both burst out laughing; he was not a bad mimic. . . .

"Bibi! Bibi! Here he comes!" Jozette said in fun; Aristide got red, and cast an involuntary glance behind him . . . then they all laughed aloud.

Jozette gazed up at Aristide. His face was pink and white after his excitement and secret joy and the velvet-grey eyes glistened dreamily . . . she saw the delicate line of nose and jaw from the ear of the pointed beard . . . how young and fresh his face looked . . . oh God! she

was so fond of him . . . she was so desperately fond of him . . . why was he like that sometimes . . . so that you could not trust him . . . she wanted so much to be able to love him altogether! . . .

Under the trees beside the dancing faun where no one was walking now, and the scarlet-trousered piou-piou at the gate stood gazing outside, she stood still, drew his head towards her and kissed him on both eyes.

Opposite the splashing cascade of the Fontaine St. Michel they stopped at the restaurant which Jozette had chosen. Under the verandah where there was no light yet, the white table-cloths stood out dimly with nothing on them but a brown earthenware cooler.

"What about sitting outside?" "A little too dark," Aristide thought.

Inside they found a large light room, glittering with mirrors and shiny coloured tiles. In the corner they discovered a comparatively secluded table unoccupied. They were unused to such a smart place where, to one side of them, they saw two men in evening dress with an elderly lady whose black silk coat was hanging over the back of her chair, and next to them, a young married couple, foreigners, probably English. All the same, it gave them a comfortably luxurious feeling to be in these less noisy surroundings, sitting on a red leather seat, quite unobserved.

They did not talk much, they sipped their clear soup, and Célestin poured out the golden wine, quite a good wine, included in their three-franc dinner.

Whilst they waited for their first meat course, Aristide, still thinking deeply about his billiard-room, said "Orange trees—a good idea; little stiff orange trees with straight trunks and gilded fruit amongst circles of leaves."

Célestin fidgeted angrily on his chair.

"Or red and white apples. . . ."

"To your convalescence and your everlasting good health,

Jozette!" . . . Célestin proposed this toast with great emphasis.

"Of course . . ." Aristide said dreamily, ". . . the same, Jozette!"

Jozette, who with little sips had half-emptied her glass, suddenly put it down and turned away her head. Célestin saw how pale and sad her little face looked, with the half-closed eyelids under the heavy black tresses; he could guess by the wrinkle above her eyes and the sharp lines round her still pale lips how much she was suffering.

Then she gave him a fright by suddenly turning her head merrily towards him, her sad eyes contrasting strangely with her laughing mouth. Holding high her glass filled with glittering, golden wine, "To your new hat, Bouboule!" she said aloud, and emptied it in one draught.

Aristide was on the point of making some cheerful remark, but at that moment the waiter arrived, carrying on one outstretched hand the long plated dish, in the other a number of forks and knives which, with subdued clatter, he placed beside their places. . . .

That evening the Noctamboules was chock-full and they did not stay long.

III

The following morning, very early, Célestin came out of the Rue Campagne Première where he lived. But this time he did not, as usual, cross over to the Boulevard Mont Parnasse to the Rue Barral. The garden did not attract him that morning, and, besides, he had nothing to do there. . . . But he was tortured with such painful thoughts that he was not able to stay in his attic; he had a headache, and felt he must get out, and so he set forth on one of his exploring expeditions across Paris.

Walking along without any particular plan, he came to the

Boulevard Port Royal. The morning sun shone through the rustling plane trees—the leaves, already a yellowish green, looked like paper silhouettes against the arid blue sky. He felt a little lonely in the Boulevard, which consisted almost entirely of walls, where only rarely a human form stirred and disappeared into a solitary block of houses, and where the whirling past of an electric tram was the only city noise.

Why had Aristide not shown his sketch to the German, he asked himself again and again? Why not? . . .

There where the Boulevard becomes a wide bridge with a view into the low-lying people's quarter, St. Médard, he climbed down an iron staircase, and walked slowly across the little vegetable market, past the old tumble-down church. He had never been here, and he felt sad and at the same time happy to be among these rough kindly people.

He ascended the narrow crooked Rue Mouffetard; the name looked black with age like the little street, he thought, and as he got higher up he read the old names of the sunlit side-alleys: the Rue de l'Arbalate, the Rue de l'Epée-de-Bois, the Rue du Pot-de-Fer . . . it amused him.

From the Rue Ortolan he landed in the Rue Gracieuse. . . . This little alley was filled with the strains of confused and unsteady singing, which emanated from a dark basement shop, where down below at a little iron table beside the low door sat two old drunkards. With their purple drowsy heads bent over the jugs of wine, they bellowed forth an indistinct Marseillaise, completely out of tune.

Célestin watched them for a moment; he had a vague recollection of a picture at the Louvre; then when some abusive language was hurled at him, he moved on.

"Rue du Puits-de-l'Ermite," he read.

How could Aristide do that? Célestin fretted; it was almost incredible and yet quite clear. Aristide had not merely forgotten. . . . Supposing he just took it for

granted! . . . But he knew that it was not true . . . he could not tell why. . . . And then came that gnawing sadness in his heart which he had known frequently of late. . . . He reached the colourless neighbourhood behind the Panthéon, where the short grass grows in tufts among the cobble-stones. It was dreary there and grey as if there were no joy left in the world.

All at once it seemed quite natural that Aristide should have acted in this way and not otherwise; it was as if he had always known that Aristide must act like this, and that he had never wanted to admit it. . . .

"Jozette," he thought . . . "Jozette!" He decided that he must have fresh air, trees, skies and water . . . he was getting too miserable; the lump in his throat was no longer to be ignored.

He walked a little way and came to the Seine. As if a curtain was raised, the wide scene unfolded itself; the mild wind from the river enveloped him, the sky was a deep blue with gleaming white, fluffy cloudlets, fleeting along quickly in the pure fresh atmosphere high above the far-away houses glowing in the sun, and the lofty gold-grey dream which seemed to rise from the midst of the blue glowing stream —Notre Dame. . . .

For a few seconds Célestin drank in this view with keen enjoyment; it was so cool and open and quiet . . . the Seine could be heard; he leant over the stone quay wall; with tiny cool ripples the waves broke along the bank.

But that swinging and gliding of light and those transparent fluid colours once more filled his heart with sadness: it was as if the murmuring water sobbed "Jozette." A sharp pain stabbed at his heart.

With a jerk he drew his cap to the other side of his head; then he pulled it off altogether and walked for a while with his face held up to the fresh breeze from off the water, walked along the Seine, gazing at the books in the cases

along the parapet. . . . He passed by without stopping to read the titles which met his eye . . . three or four titles in each box. . . . He must go on looking and reading names.

The bridges with their swarms of people and 'buses and cabs occasionally interrupted his aimless gaze. Should he take the tram to the big boulevards? Should he go to the markets or the Louvre? But he did neither the one nor the other. He kept to the pavement along the quay walk, his heavy head bent down over the trays of books; occasionally he stopped a moment, took one mechanically, but went on when he thought that a salesman was coming towards him. . . .

He felt relieved when the trays of books came to an end, and the grey freestone wall pursued its restful course along the rippling water. On the opposite side was the long blind wall of the Louvre, half-hidden by the sun-flecked leaves of the high trees which stood on the ramparts. Down below, in the slightly gilded shade, the carters allowed their horses to wade through the cool grey water which was lit up here and there by a flash of light across the darkly shimmering waves; they plunged their tramping feet, and their glossy coats quivered as they shook their powerful heads; cautiously they splashed through the gradually deepening stream until the water dashed against their bellies, and a huge white cart-horse, with his blue-marbled body immersed in a glory of green and silver-white circles, threw up his sturdy head, and his neighing sounded like a laughing sonorous song across the reverberating water. . . .

A little later, Célestin steered his way through the burning desert of the Place de la Concorde; he was dead tired, not with walking, which he could do for hours on end, but with an ever-present grief gnawing at his heart. He knew of a small café in the Rue St. Honoré. There he sat down outside and drank a glass of lemonade . . . when his glass

was empty, he bethought himself that he ought to have taken a cup of coffee; he had scarcely breakfasted, and felt hungry. Suddenly a series of pictures succeeded one another in his mind . . . a table at Mazarin, Jozette in an Italian straw hat with a large red rose, her little face completely shaded by the brim which swayed backwards and forwards as she moved her head; she drank green Chartreuse, and with each sip her carmine lips smiled at him through the glittering green of the liqueur in the glass . . . on the Boulevard Montparnasse . . . they were drinking tea because Jozette had a headache; Aristide said: "Bouboule never goes out now with that girl of his. . . ." Jozette filled the cups, her little finger raised in the air; she asked "Why not?" . . . A summer-house in Fontenay-sous-Bois; Jozette had taken off her hat . . . they drank yellow bubbly wine and Jozette spilled some over his hand when she wanted to touch glasses with Aristide; she dried it with her little handkerchief . . . it was a handkerchief with a border of red spots, exhaling the fragrance of a flower-garden . . . yesterday evening Jozette raised her glass to him and laughed into his eyes: "To your new hat, Bouboule. . . ." Célestin jumped up roughly; he threw five sous on to the table and departed.

A little while later he was walking in an avenue behind the Elysée. There, under the heavy trees, not a leaf rustled, and it was cool as if there had been rain; beside the avenue was a low white house, in a shady nook, rather like a for-ester's house.

"How cool! . . . it is like champagne! . . ." Célestin thought, as he caught the sweet melody. It was Jozette's voice and her words as she had said them that afternoon in the garden. . . . Vehemently he shook his head, as if he wished to drive away many another thought.

On the road, in front of a quiet fountain, stood a seat, bathed in shadow, and Célestin was suddenly overcome with a vehement desire to be sitting there, in his arms a dear

little woman who would belong to him and whom he could clasp to him and kiss. He fell sideways on to the seat, his arms resting on the back, and buried his face in his hot hands. In the stillness of the deserted lane he could hear his own heavy breathing and the moans which were forced from him. Then, feeling ashamed of himself, he gazed straight ahead.

He pictured Aristide, tall and slim, with his finely moulded face and his dreamy grey eyes, walking here on this road with Jozette clinging to his arm, looking up at him. . . .

"Yes, yes, yes!" he muttered. Thoughtfully he rubbed the carbuncle on his cap, and pulled it straight on his thick hair.

He rose, dawdled for a minute, looked vaguely about him, then went down to the Avenue Marigny, to the Port Alexandre. That morning there was, at the end of the avenue, an incessant traffic of cabs and motors shooting past, and the thought came into Célestin's head—if you were unhappy, then you threw yourself down here and got out of it. . . .

But almost immediately afterwards he straightened his massive shoulders with a dejected laugh. . . . You could do that, but of course you didn't. . . .

He walked on. . . . Two sisters of St. Vincent-de-Paul, their white-winged *coiffes* swaying harmoniously above their cool convent garments, walked past him with measured footsteps.

A moment later he found himself at the Guignol of the Champs Elysées.

The roped-in space under the low lime trees beside the avenue looked small and neat. The little red and yellow curtain of the marionette show was still closed, but the musician, with his concertina, dragged along his three-legged stool and struck up the first few disjointed bars; on the very low front seats rows of children were already sitting: they sat there very quiet and restfully in a state of tense expecta-

tion. There were a few slum children in black pinafores, their little wisps of hair tied with coloured bows, standing straight on end, and beside them one or two in white frocks, their rosy faces round and plump inside the embroidered baby hats.

The seats were so low that they sat with knees drawn up, forming a lap; the little hands either rested there peacefully or were waved in the air with attractive signs of impatient expectation.

Behind them and on the higher seats, small groups of children, accompanied by a few grown-up people, were dotted about; when the concertina man began his lilting tune, some more arrived and swelled the circle of onlookers along the rope. Célestin stood watching with mild interest; he had pushed his broad frame in between two street boys and waited until the show began.

Though still weighed down by an aching sense of misery, his thoughts were drawn by slow stages to the sweet scene which was enacted before his eyes; he saw the vague outline of snub noses, little open mouths and rounded cheeks; he saw the eyes, two sparks of merriment, two shining pools of curiosity, two small dark depths of an unanswered question: he saw the children's clothes and the movements of the little bodies inside them, he also saw their intense absorption, the occasional jerk of their heads, the twisting and craning of their scraggy necks, little bodies and arms in complete harmony with the performance, the violent excitement and shouts as the play progressed. . . . Guignol in his blue shirt bangs his wooden head on the wainscot; he is almost beside himself with exuberance of spirits because he has cheated the girl and taken in the policeman, and his uncle got the beating which was meant for him; hugging himself with delight, his back bent double, his short arms sticking out like bean-poles, he rolls about on the edge of the stage; he simply cannot stop his mad pranks, and the children tumble against

each other with laughing. But all at once the rascal's fun comes to a close. The children are alarmed when the duped policeman, with his bulging eyes and a piece of wood pressed tightly to his body, falls upon Guignol, who cannot escape, and the rogue receives a sound thrashing.

The deep voice resounds from the depths of the marionette show:

"You have drunk the wine from your uncle's jug?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" the children, who are completely absorbed in the play, shout from the front bench, before Guignol, weeping and rubbing his back with his little twisted arm, has time to answer.

"And you have also drunk the milk with which Gertrude was going to make the soup for your uncle?"

"No, no, no!" cry the little ones, who uphold justice, for it was the cat who had drunk the milk. . . .

And then commences a new act full of Guignol's wicked escapades.

Half an hour later, Célestin was still on the same spot behind the rope. His clear blue eyes radiated the same joy as the children's eyes; his cap was pushed rakishly to the back of his head. He could have stood for hours enjoying the little ones' fun and their pretty ways. . . . When, just before twelve the curtain of the marionette show rattled down and the man with the concertina was drawling out his parting tune, Célestin heaved a sigh, looked about him as if the whole world had been transformed for a space, and was amazed at his sorrow, which he discovered like a strange but familiar thing at the bottom of his heart.

IV

Early that morning the box containing their drawings had been sent off to Roubaix. Aristide had purchased one or two "artistic" ties, a very smart dove-grey Paris hat, and a

pair of light-brown shoes—he wished to return to his native town as a real Parisian—but Célestin was quite satisfied with his new hat and new soles to his boots.

And at half-past three they all left the house: Célestin and Aristide, each carrying his own suit-case, Aristide a grey linen valise with light-brown leather corners, Célestin a square black canvas turnip of unknown origin. Célestin had wanted to take the drawings themselves, but this suggestion was turned down by Aristide; no, they would arrive like gentlemen at Roubaix; he had no wish to toil like a porter on the platform and go to the building himself with a “Please, here are the sketches.”

Jozette was a little quiet as she walked between them: she had often dreaded Aristide’s tiresome jealousy which would most certainly be displayed before he went away; this and the other would not be allowed: he would want to order her entire days from morning to evening. He had been sweeter to her and more in love than ever, but he had not restricted her liberty by a single question. She told herself that there would be no sense in such jealousy just now, because they knew that Thierry was somewhere in Normandy, and they never saw anything of Lourty now. Nevertheless, it gave her an uncomfortable feeling, but, on the other hand, she thought: “My dear little boy, how entirely he is taken up with his journey!” In spite of herself, she hoped that he would forbid her something, or give her an order.

Aristide, his arm round her waist, enjoyed her sweet face, which he would not see for so many days, and he talked airily: “Come now, you must not be depressed, a week soon passes . . . I will send you a post card every day.”

“By the way,” he said, a little later, “if you should see the German, you must be sure to ask if he has ever mentioned it. . . .” But he changed his mind at once: “No, perhaps she had better say nothing . . . perhaps it might be better for him to deal with the matter himself.”

At the Gare du Nord, whilst Aristide waited at the end of the queue to take their tickets, Jozette and Célestin, among the swarms of people, walked up and down the station entrance. Célestin looked very upset and hot; suddenly, with a sort of shy abruptness, he began to talk; if he had money in his pocket he invariably spent it . . . he would rather not take it to Roubaix. . . . Would Jozette keep it for him? . . . and with a fiery red face, he added: "If, by any chance, you require any, just take it; Bibi can give it back to me later. . . ."

He had been pondering about this all day: Aristide was so absorbed in those showy ties and shoes; would he have left her enough money? . . . He had not dared to ask straight out. . . . Also, he guessed vaguely at Jozette's past life, and the thought that in difficulties she might come to questionable actions had stung him like a sharp pain. . . .

"Will you use it if you require it?" he urged again. And with sudden vehemence: "You will be sensible, won't you? You will be sensible?" he implored.

Jozette looked at him in dismay; then she blushed violently and put up a trembling hand, so as to prevent him going any farther. With a simultaneous instinct they turned and walked towards Aristide, who was just bending down at the booking-office. She held Célestin's purse in her hand, and, looking at him, shook her head gently and returned it to him with a little uncertain laugh as if she wished to plead his forgiveness.

"Bibi has given me money," she said, "and I have some myself also. . . . Thank you!"

"Many thanks indeed," she said again very kindly, as Célestin, with a curiously drawn face, put the little purse in his pocket again.

An hour later, Jozette was walking alone in the Boulevard de Strasburg, on her way home. She walked slowly, as if she wanted to stay out as long as possible, and she looked

troubled: she was not really anxious; she knew quite well that everything was all right, but a pain gnawed at her heart, a pain which went deeper than the sudden sensation of loneliness.

CHAPTER 9

I

AUTUMN had come to Paris. It was as if the clear cool mornings and early twilight evenings clasped the sun-warmed afternoons like a summer glow between two fresh breezes, and the nights were mild, as they are in August.

Town life still retained its quieter throb of the dead season: the Avenue des Champs Elysées looked in the mornings like a lonely highroad near a provincial town—the wide Boulevards had in the evening, lit up by a glittering stream of light from the cafés and the revolving diamond-stands in the shop windows, dark gaps, made by deserted pavement corners under dusky walls, where at other times, in the packed vestibules of the theatres, the Paris world amuses itself; and along the closed hotels in the Boulevard Saint Germain, the chestnut trees flowered for the second time.

The group of trees in the Luxembourg, under which in the spring and summer time lively students with their merry girls stood in knots, now looked like a forsaken country seat, where the gardener is sweeping the withered leaves into piles and a wandering woman disappears into a distant avenue. But down below, down the wide marble steps, lay the open gardens round the pond, bursting into their fullest bloom of a thousand blazing colours.

Slowly, so that her lameness was scarcely visible, Madame Dutoit sauntered along the sunny path; at regular intervals and very lightly, her stick tapped the slippery asphalt, and in her smooth rather excitable face the little dark eyes shone

with an inner peace. Her mind had refreshed itself as the turbulent riotous flower-beds which, unknown to herself, gave her a restful sense of restored balance. Every afternoon before dinner this was her regular outing, and from these walks in the Luxembourg she came home as if from an excursion among the crowds of people and the wealth of colours in the large shops—tired after all the passionate sights, which her eyes had beheld, placid and with satisfied desires.

In the spring, as soon as the fire of tulips was extinguished, the garden ceased to interest her for a time. The tenderness of the dew-blue forget-me-not beds, the fragile blossoms in the orchards and the gently swaying pale lilacs did not captivate her. On these days she used to walk along the hawthorn terraces, but the all too sweet scent did not refresh her.

That full strong vapour which now rose up out of the sunbaked late summer flowers, that vapour without any particular scent, a vapour of growth and green and much-watered heavy earth, intermixed with that of an African lily or forced late heliotrope, came to meet her deliciously. She wandered about and breathed it in as an atmosphere which belonged to her. Then she went down the wide exit avenue, where the boys playing at football amused her, and took the Avenue de l'Observatoire, straight to Carpeaux' fountain, with the rearing horses whose bronze breasts were sprayed by the tortoises in the rainspecked pond.

After she had stood there for an instant and cooled her head in the spray, which floated towards her, driven by the wind, she crossed the square, bought her evening paper at the Kiosk, and took the longer road in order to see whether the Gros were there as usual; this was her daily amusement.

Gros, with his hat beside him, leant backwards, his bow legs stretched lazily far apart, his feet meekly side by side on the sand. She, her pointed face severe-looking under the

little toque, sat, stiff as a poker, beside him; she gave one troubled sidelong glance in frightened recognition, and with a vague uneasy knowledge of being looked at, she turned away her scared head.

"Stupid people," thought Madame Dutoit. She was glad that she had found them out again, and in high spirits she sauntered home and heated the dishes for Herz which Jeanne had prepared in the morning.

But the next day her placid mood had changed entirely.

"Jeanne, what is a 'vergiss-mein-nicht'?" "Jeanne, do you know where Metz is?" "Jeanne, what does 'aeternum vale' mean?" In this manner her restless mind worked and unburdened itself to the one hapless human being in her vicinity: she bombarded Jeanne with questions gleaned from the most unexpected winding paths of her mind, along which her feverish thoughts ever circled round one point.

Every year, towards the middle of September, Herz travelled along the Rhine and the Moselle in order to make certain of the German wines from the larger vineyards, for which he had his regular customers in and round about Paris. At the same time he visited his relatives in Lorraine.

These yearly wine journeys were a torture in Madame Dutoit's life. She was not jealous; at least three of the seven days in the week he was now here, now there, and she never knew a minute's suspicion about the use of his time. But that German family of Jews in Lorraine she hated like poison; she loathed Sarreguenimes, from whence Herz came—"Saargemund," as he would sometimes say, with sudden emotion, and at such moments he, who at other times seemed to be so entirely a Frenchman, and who spoke French as purely as she did, and scarcely showed any trace of Jewish blood—at such moments she hated what remained of the German in him, but more especially of the Jew. That "Saargemund" was to her like a seemingly dead mollusc and without immediate danger, but it waited, it spied, pa-

tiently, until all at once on a slowly but surely approaching day, it would stretch out its indolent groping arms, without warning and without escape. And when he had left her for his "Saargemund," that collection of Israelites, clinging together like limpets, who would fawn alarmingly about him, became to her an unbearable obsession. There were unmarried cousins there—blonde, perpetually smiling jewesses, she imagined. This picture was firmly rooted in her mind, and owed its origin chiefly to a memory of an illustration in an old novel belonging to Herz, which depicted the fashions of the year '50—jewesses with firm milk-white flesh, with large, round, blue eyes and thick plaits wound about their heads; they would be dressed like very young girls, in fluffy white muslin frocks, with innumerable little flounces; upon their much-bared necks a heart-shaped locket would hang, tied to a sky-blue ribbon, with long ends fluttering on their backs. . . . She never mentioned all this: for eleven months in the year it became more and more a foolish unreality, but each autumn it was a fresh horror: "At the falling of the leaves," she said to herself, with a desire to give it a tragic touch. Because what could the reason be that all these tormenting thoughts always gnawed at her and sometimes mastered her entirely? Surely she knew better now, and it did not seem fair to her good, honest Herz. . . . Even in the midst of her obsessions, when for several minutes at a time she succeeded in regaining her sound common-sense, she would come to the conclusion that it was all a wicked fancy. But these feelings were so old, like a corrosion of her soul . . . dating from the first hours of their life together. . . . Oh, that thing which she knew to be always there, that secret homesickness which shone in his eyes and made his words glow always again; that burning longing, not for her, it had hurt her for all time, a wound in the depths of her unconsciousness, which would probably never heal.

During the last few years Herz had changed so entirely

that they hardly ever talked about his country. But before that she had often tried to fight those homesick longings with emphatic arguments, which were met with unflinching placidity: she remembered her protestations "that, considering he came from Lorraine, his real fatherland was, and always would be, France," and how she, speculating on his horror of the "pickelhaube" had insinuated that these "dirty Prussians" would surely not have been able to change his deepest sentiments. . . . Was he not happy in old, loyal Paris? Did he not feel free and at home? After such an eloquent dissertation, which flowed off Herz like water off a duck's back, he would say diffidently that he had never mentioned that he loved Germany more than France; on the contrary, France was dear to him. Nevertheless, German was the language of his "pays" . . . his "patric," very well, that might be France, even though it were only because she lived there. . . . But what on earth had persuaded her, he always teased in conclusion, to have herself christened "Germaine," when she disliked the Germans so much?

She had never been able to cope with so much placidity; for a moment he had convinced her against her better judgment that everything was quite natural. All the same, her mind was not at peace; that wretched "Fatherland" had not been argued away. . . . All these years it had gone well; he had come back just as kind and genial as before he went away. But at each home-coming she had noticed something strange about him—a German business-term which he was never in the habit of using, the whistling of melancholy tunes which she did not know, his hair and beard cut in an un-Parisian manner, the saying "bitte" when handing her anything at table, his mind elsewhere as if in saying it he cherished something which he left behind him there . . . she hated it all.

Every year she felt a deeper conviction that Herz and she were tied to one another for life—and every year when he

went there she had that sharp stab at her heart as if this were to be the year of their misfortune. One day it would be too much for him; one of those fair-haired Gretchens would get round him, and Paris would never see him again. This year the plans for his travels had hung fire. Herz thought he would give his orders from a distance; he had dealt with these firms for so many years, and they knew exactly what he wanted, he would "take the journey on paper." Then all at once he changed his mind, and in a week Herz decided he was going to Germany. . . . After two days of variability and moods, Madame Dutoit had fallen into the depths of depression. Jeanne never heard an unexpected word now, and from behind the closed shop-door the unctuous monotones of a priest, trying on hats, might be distinguished above the faded tones of the woman's voice.

When the new week had set in, Madame Dutoit, strained and ominous, as if a sentence were being pronounced, came and told Jeanne to fetch the large handbag out of the box-room. She made her put it in the shop, and began to pack. As she dragged her halting footsteps backwards and forwards to the bedroom Jeanne heard her arrange things aloud—"three pairs of thin socks . . . three pairs of thick ones . . . two white vests . . ."—the whole morning, like a spirit of unrest; while the agitated tip-tap of the stick sounded on the polished floor.

And a dozen times during the course of the morning Herz came rushing out of the dining-room into the shop. His kindly light-brown short-sighted eyes screwed up anxiously under the knitted brow; he watched the packing, full of little meddlesome interferences . . . "Had she not forgotten his everyday jacket? . . . What about his two new ties?" . . . He turned the contents into a corner of the bag, to make certain. Oh yes, it was there . . . and he went inside, where he was busy arranging his papers. These nervous and

rather trivial arrangements, quite foreign to a man who spent half his life in trains, and which in point of fact he never showed in connexion with any of his other journeys, provoked her exceedingly and made her even more miserable than she was.

Dead-tired, her head hot with so much troubled thinking, she sat and sewed on loose buttons and mended his things. . . . Herz would at least arrive there with clothes to which no one could possibly take exception . . . and in the meantime her thoughts struggled on and twirled and whirled round that journey and round her life with Herz.

Then, by degrees, by dint of paying attention to her work, her thoughts were forced into a more tranquil groove, so that she dreamed peacefully about old times and the present.

She dwelt on those ten long years which they had spent together—years during which they had always got on well together, better than a hundred married couples. That was the inner peace of her life. She thought of the dejected state in which she had discovered Herz . . . a struggling little broker, naïve and clumsy, with a child's heart, already more than half lost in the whirlpool of Paris . . . and she . . . a widow of eight years' standing, carrying on her deceased parents' hat-shop, a strong woman of thirty-four, not pretty, but rather handsome, in spite of her lameness, with a clever head, a woman for whom life had no terrors and at that time already in possession of a number of free principles upon which she prided herself. That little German plodder, with his homesick-looking eyes and his quiet friendly face, had at first excited her pity; then, when she noticed what a square peg in a round hole he was in that immense and strange Paris, and how entirely unsuited for his profession, but that in reality he was much more sensible and staid than she, and with a much greater knowledge of many subjects of which she knew nothing, she had become really fond of him and he, in the destitution of his per-

plexed life, had clung to her and with her help had risen to the surface again. And so they had always remained together, each earning his own living, free and utterly good to each other. And as the years passed by, in the depths of her heart she began to respect him more and more, and became more and more devoted to him. Their peculiarities had become accentuated: in him, his weakness for collecting, or his preference for lounging in the dim dining-room, full of old rubbish, clad in his oldest coats: in her case, the love of domineering and her capricious abruptness . . . she knew it only too well, but she knew also that this was nothing but an outward show of power, and that in reality Herz' quiet prudence was the rock against which she leaned; Herz' fidelity was the creed of her life; Herz' unostentatious rule her peace.

She had changed a great deal in those ten years; she felt all at once with a chill terror that as a deserted woman she would not possess the elasticity to endure a life of disillusionment.

If only, she thought, Herz could make up his mind to give up his wine-selling . . . if their friendship could have reached the point when they had one business between them, what a lot of worry that would have saved her! She had always planned that if Herz should ever talk about marrying, she would say straight out that this was nonsense . . . but she longed for a partnership . . . in a "what's mine is yours, what's yours is mine" sort of style, and together they would stand up against Paris.

And indeed it would have been much better. Herz was clever, and a shrewd man of business; . . . nevertheless . . . he was no salesman . . . although a Jew, his wine dealings were not conducted on Jewish lines—absolutely conscientious and trustworthy; everything could stand the light of day; his old customers, whom he gradually collected chiefly by recommendation, were as sure as houses; but he had not

the knack of coming to the people in an easy suave manner and persuading them by means of smooth skill and a stream of words; he had no appearance, no address, was too modest . . . while she knew herself to be smart and plucky, with a fund of abundant energy burning within her; sometimes she got so weary of selling a few dozen hats a week to the black-coats. . . . What a waste of precious years . . . while with her pushfulness and robust constitution, combined with Herz' business knowledge and caution, they might start a large hat-shop somewhere on a fine boulevard.

Her wandering thoughts returned to earth with a bump. . . . Yes . . . such things *might* be . . . but supposing it were too late. . . .

And all at once she burst forth: "Jeanne, the master is going to 'die Heimat!' Do you know what that is?" And when Jeanne, with a little jump, out of the kindness of her heart, because she knew the other woman to be miserable, shook her head, Madame shouted, feigning cheerfulness, "The Fatherland! The Fatherland! Do you understand that, then?"

That evening Herz and she sat in their dining-room, under the lamp. She had fried some particularly sweet apricot fritters, which he loved, and from the piled-up plate beside him he pricked one after another with his fork and nibbled it up.

He looked depressed, and several times he turned half-way round in his chair, turning over the leaves of the papers on the desk behind him. His face, with the lamplight falling slantwise across one cheek, appeared old and sunken, with rather pathetic little skimpy locks of hair at his neck. She felt sad and at the same time pleased when she noticed it.

She had changed her dress that evening and wore a shimmery claret-coloured blouse, trimmed with narrow white

lace, which made her look young. Then she got up to get a glass of wine from the sideboard for Herz, and, her manner of speech becoming very gentle and urgent, she gave him some good advice in connexion with his journey. He nodded and looked at her meditatively. There was an unspoken thought in his head.

After that he finished the last fritters; they were particularly nice, he praised, and smiled at her.

II

The following morning, when Herz had left, Madame Dutoit, in a frenzy of activity, started unpacking the new consignments of hats, which had arrived in large quantities a day or two ago. She always saw to that: when Herz set forth on his fateful autumn travels, the season's new models must have arrived; so that for two or three days she was so inundated with work that there was no time left to worry.

By sheer strength of will she forced her rebellious brain to plan calmly as she worked. She knew that if she did not keep her head and pay attention to what she was doing the subsequent confusion would be immense. In the farthest corner of the room towered the still untouched blocks of boxes, a double row of twelve, tied together with French string, little shiny cardboard buildings. In front of that, like a straggling town at the foot of a cathedral, the floor was strewn with the hastily unpacked contents, as well as all the scattered rubbish of last year, a medley of empty boxes, broken lids, rows of hats, towers of hats, the one fitting into the other; among much silky tissue-paper, the occasional mysterious glimmer of a colour could be seen, the green and violet and gold of a prelate's headgear.

And for hours at a time Madame Dutoit, clad in a short-skirted red dressing-gown, stepped across everything, undid strings, lifted down boxes; then up again, counted, fingered,

held up to the light, and every now and then steered her way to the large tome and the papers on her desk, filled in, calculated, scored out. . . . Her weariness and hurry had made her gait particularly halting. When late in the afternoon she had built her piles out as far as the hall-door, two very young chaplains announced themselves to Jeanne.

"Come in! Come in!" cried Madame Dutoit, who had heard their voices. With one or two deft decided movements of her arms, she cleared a space and dragged open the door. . . . The chaplains remained standing on the doorstep, looking bashful: the front one said that they wanted to buy a travelling hat. . . .

"Move along, messieurs," Madame Dutoit invited, busy tidying away the rubbish near the mirror.

Blushingly the young chaplains lifted their long soutanes, and with their stout stocking-clad calves and silver-buckled shoes, stepped over the piles of boxes to the little island in front of the looking-glass where in great consternation they cast down their eyes in front of their own images.

On the evening of the second day everything was in order; the shop walls were spotless and gleaming with many shiny brand-new boxes, while all the old cast-off things were put away in the little room, from where the message boy from the "*Marchande du Temple*" would take them. In her neat shop, where there was nothing left to be done, Madame Dutoit wandered restlessly, accompanied by the tip-tap of her stick.

She saw Herz, with carefully brushed hair and his new blue tie, pacing up and down a large room, full of unusual furniture; there was a woman with him, a fair woman in a white dress, who came towards him. . . .

She saw Herz again, an illustrated German paper in front of him, in an arbour. He was wearing his black and white check waistcoat, and was sitting in his shirt-sleeves,

as he liked to do on fine days. . . . He appeared to be quite at home there, and again there was a woman with him, a young girl, with a long plait of fair hair. She was handing him a little glass, and he looked up with his kind light-brown eyes. . . .

Madame Dutoit shook her head violently, as if she wished to chase away these pictures. "Thank God," she reflected, "that Madame Bertin is coming this evening."

The following afternoon, when Madame Dutoit was going for a walk in the Luxembourg, past the loge, Madame Carpentier darted out of the glass door. She was still busy changing, and hurriedly fastened the last few mother-of-pearl buttons on her blouse. "No . . . there are no letters," she said, in an emphatic contradictory tone and shaking her head sympathetically as if it were a foregone conclusion that the other woman had come to inquire about this in self-pity.

Madame Dutoit, at first astonished at being spoken to in this uncalled-for manner, then suddenly became very white—she had understood the hostile meaning . . . she was not really expecting a letter—with the exception of a meaningless picture postcard, Herz rarely wrote when he was away from home, but the note of cunning in Madame Carpentier's voice had fanned the flame of her superstitious fear!

She controlled herself, however, and walked on calmly. Dressed quietly in a dark blouse, Jozette came in at the front door, and she was forced to stop for a moment to let her pass.

A malicious expression crept into the concierge's steel-blue eyes: as Madame Dutoit walked cautiously across the threshold she struggled after her to the open door, and, looking across her shoulder into the hall, where she heard Jozette going quietly up the stairs, she said: "She doesn't

look very jolly . . . and no wonder . . . a kept woman . . . and her gentleman off on the loose," and with hypocritical affability she was on the point of relating some anecdote: "The other day . . ."

"Good-bye . . ." Madame Dutoit said, obviously confused, and turned away.

She walked straight on and did not go to the Luxembourg; she went down the Boulevard du Mont Parnasse and back along the same road. Her hip was tired with limping, her right-hand fingers clasped the ivory handle of her stick convulsively.

. . . Supposing she had to go on in this way all the years which were in front of her, an object of ridicule, a bitter, deserted woman. . . . It was curious, when she came to think of it, that Herz and she had never breathed a word about marrying, although no doubt he thought that she would stick to her principles. If only he had suggested it once, in spite of all her theories . . . why had he never done that? She tortured herself. She knew that he had by no means such decided opinions on this subject as she had. Why then had he never tried to convert her to a more normal relationship . . . all the more because he must have noticed often enough how some people looked down on her on account of her unmarried state? . . . It left her entirely cold, but why had it never hurt him?

Then she thought of Herz and how depressed he had looked that last evening. She felt the pathetic little wisps of hair in his neck . . . and all at once she was overcome with a sense of pity and warmth towards him, which was stronger than her doubts.

At the corner of the street she saw the house, white among the row of greyer buildings with all the newly-painted white shutters up to the roof-garden, bright with flowers. To the left of the front door her large brass name-plate stood out . . . and in the middle of the flat

house-front one little balcony only seemed to project . . . these were the three rooms, belonging to Herz and her. The house looked so kindly in the empty afternoon street, but suddenly it was as if she saw right through it: inside it was all wrong; two piles of flat boxes, full of impure odours and quarrels and grief, full of lonely lives and human faces in unwatched loneliness. . . .

She went inside with a shudder.

And no sooner did the latch click behind her than Carpentier appeared in the loge-door. She could see by his set face that he was going to be disagreeable, and behind him loomed his wife's threatening bulk.

"She is quite upset," Hortense had remarked, when her husband came in; "now is the time to get hold of her!"

Clad in his hastily donned morning-coat he sat waiting. His roving eyelid screwed up above the glassy-grey sightless pupil, he said, with a sly look of secret fear, succeeded by one of joy: "Madame, I cannot allow, though you may be a thousand times Madame Dutoit, the order of the house to be disturbed by you. If that boy from the 'Temple' comes again after twelve o'clock to remove your rubbish, we will take the liberty to send him away. If you want to have a rag-and-bone man with dirty boxes on the stairs in the afternoon . . . you will have to go and live in a different sort of house."

Madame Dutoit tried to find an answer. . . . She leant heavily on her stick, then nodded her head in a fit of nervous rage and offended impotency and hurried on.

Carpentier returned triumphantly to the loge.

Madame Dutoit marched upstairs from the shop to the dining-room, and from the dining-room back to the shop; then aimlessly and with abrupt movements she straightened some boxes on a shelf.

She was furious with herself: that man could only come in

afternoons . . . the *marchande* had told her that in the mornings he had to help on the market. . . . Surely she might have said that . . . she had allowed herself to be scolded like a child.

The following morning she was still full of it.

"Those Carpentiers . . . those Carpentiers . . ." she burst forth to Jeanne.

"Oh, I know all about that," said Jeanne, who had just been told of several fresh provocations to Madame Lourty.

And that instantaneous word of understanding calmed Madame Dutoit's anger.

With special care, Jeanne served lunch that day: it was as if she expressed her sympathy and desire to comfort in her cautious movements, as she put down a dish, or took away a used plate . . . but Madame Dutoit did not notice it. That afternoon the boy did not come.

Alone, in the quiet of her apartment, she tried to fight out for herself her plan of campaign. She knew quite well what she ought to do! She ought to go downstairs and ask if he had been or not, and according to the answer write to the shop. . . . She could not go to the loge. She hated herself. Never yet had she been in the position of not daring to say what was necessary. But those sordid suspicious glances tortured her like ill-omens. Carpentier's sneaky eye, his wife's impudent, keen, blue ones, seemed to insult Herz, and yet each time it seemed to her that the flame of malice which affected her so deeply was fanned by a secret and inevitable power.

Then she called herself names for being a coward, and went down after all—but having arrived at the loge, passed it, and, in a state of violent indecision, walked to the Luxembourg where she met Jozette in a quiet path. She would have liked to talk to her, but did not do it. She just bowed in a friendly manner: "Bonjour, mademoiselle," and

walked on. The next morning she sent Jeanne down.

"Is Madame Dutoit afraid of us that she does not come herself?" Hortense demanded impertinently.

"Madame Dutoit has no reason to be afraid of you," Jeanne snapped back; "Madame is ill this morning."

"And when does Monsieur Herz return?" the concierge's wife inquired, as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Jeanne did not reply to this, but repeated her message. . . . "No, the boy had not been."

"Emile," said Madame Carpentier, as an hour later they sat at their meal, "Emile, you will see . . ."

They had a bet about it. "Herz will come back," Carpentier had said, and she, "Herz will not come back." "And what about last year? You imagined all sorts of things then also. . . ." "Last year she behaved quite differently," Hortense protested, "and why did he come and tell me a week beforehand that Dutoit must not have his letters? . . . You will see, he has deserted her . . . she has not heard a word from him. . . . And now, I am absolutely certain," said the concierge's wife, "he is not coming back." And she told him about the message from Jeanne.

Carpentier sat greedily sucking his bushy moustache; he blinked his bad eye in high glee. They had managed to bring her down a peg or two, "Madame la baronne de Vieux Chapeaux. . . ."

"Ah, ça!" he said, in a tone of voice which implied, "Who would not stoop to us in the end?"

And Hortense wondered about all the practical details. What would she do? Would she keep on the business? To whom did the business actually belong? To him or to her?

Carpentier shrugged his shoulders with immense disdain. What did all that matter to him? He banged his fist on the table.

"She must go!" he said wildly. How? Why? He did

not think of that. "She must go." They even spoke about it to Madame Leguënne and to Louis at supper.

But two days later Herz suddenly returned.

A little tired after his journey, good naturedly cheerful, lugging his bag along himself, he stepped into the loge, with a quiet kindly greeting, just as usual.

"Nom de nom!" Hortense swore.

Two hours later Madame Dutoit came downstairs. Her clear strong eyes gazed resolutely from her honest face.

"Is it allowed to harm any one with intent, in the carrying on of his business?" she inquired with the assurance which betokens inevitable and conclusive evidence in the background.

"You mean to say . . . you mean to say . . ." Carpentier stammered.

"It says in the printed lease that messages . . ." Hortense tried to say.

"That the tradesmen . . ." Madame Dutoit corrected.

"That the tradesmen must come before twelve . . ." Hortense wavered.

"And is a tradesman the same as a customer?" Madame Dutoit demanded triumphantly as she looked at Carpentier and his wife, turn about.

Hortense, who could find nothing more to say, shrugged her shoulders. Carpentier's closed eye trembled above his nervously twitching cheek. . . .

"There you are," Madame Dutoit finished the argument. And with condescension born of an undisputed victory, she added:

"I shall see to it that the boy calls to-morrow afternoon."

After that she had closed the loge-door calmly and proceeded on her way upstairs; the pleasant gentle tip-tap of her stick could be heard on the hall-tiles and the wooden staircase.

CHAPTER 10

I

ON the evening that Aristide and Célestin went to Roubaix, Jozette ran in to see Mademoiselle Villetard at about seven o'clock. She had neglected the old lady a little the last few days.

It was getting dark in the room, and Mademoiselle was not there; but she saw her sitting on the dusky balcony, a thin black shawl over her head. Jozette closed the door behind her, and Mademoiselle, looking up to see who was there, peered inside.

"How do you do, dearie . . ." she said, warmly. "Have you come again at last? . . . Sit down. . . . Yes, it has been hot . . . no wonder you come to your balcony. . . ." She threatened her gaily with a finger.

Mademoiselle knew perfectly well that the two painters had gone out of town that afternoon; she had watched the three of them, the boys carrying their suit-cases, walking in the direction of the tram . . . but she did not mention that; with a rather weak-minded hypocrisy towards herself, even in her thoughts, she avoided anything which had any direct bearing on Jozette's irregular relations; should she happen to see them together, she tried to look upon them as a young married couple, but apart from that, she thought of Jozette alone. Their little chat, on the morning of the jam-making episode, had cleared the air, inasmuch as it had left her a feeling of true fondness for the girl, but it had not brought about the slightest change in her principles, as to what was immoral and sinful and what not. Ever since

that morning Aristide's name had not crossed her lips, and she was grateful when Jozette, prompted by a wish to keep clear of awkward situations, behaved in the same way.

But this evening she was too full of her recent separation to keep up her customary silence.

"I went with them to the Gare du Nord," she said musingly, without further explanation.

"Did you?" Mademoiselle Villetard, a little embarrassed, did not pursue the subject.

"It is funny, Aristide being away," Jozette continued.

Facing each other in their basket-chairs, they remained silent for a while; then, because it was getting cooler, they came inside the door; Mademoiselle Villetard lit the lamp in the sitting-room.

But very soon the old woman's face looked as smooth and sweet as ever, and as their gentle conversation pursued its even tenor, her face reflected the number of kindly thoughts passing through her mind. Finally she shuffled up, went to the sideboard and returned with a large dish of *blanquette* and rice. She had counted on having enough for dinner for the following day, because she ate so little; but a much better idea had come to her.

"I have been so stupid," she said, with a priceless little display of regret, "look what a lot of this I have cooked, and I have already lunched off it. It will not keep till to-morrow . . . won't you help me to finish it, Jozette?"

Jozette saw her meaning quite clearly: the little Villetard did not want to leave her alone, that first evening; but she only said, "Delicious! I am so fond of *blanquette*!"

Mademoiselle Villetard looked delighted with the success of her fib, and when Jozette started heating it herself, she was even more pleased. . . . It gratified her love of ease that for once her meal was served without any trouble.

She rested luxuriously in her plush-arm chair at the table, the somewhat yellow blue-veined hands in her lap,

but she was watching without really seeing much, for in her head she was weaving an entirely new set of plans.

But when supper was served there was another painful moment for the old woman. Suddenly she remembered Jozette as the painter's *grisette*, and began to wonder "How much wine will she drink? . . . a good deal probably . . . she will be accustomed to that. . . ." She herself, very temperate, made half a bottle do for three days. But as she dallied by the sideboard with the corkscrew and the large bottle, Jozette interfered very decidedly; holding the half-full small bottle which had been placed on the table up to the light, she said, "Not for me . . . there is plenty. . . . I only drink a drop mixed with water . . . really not . . ."

Mademoiselle Villetard, relieved, put the bottle back in the cupboard, and, her mind at rest, she said generously: "All the same, you are welcome to it, my child."

Under the lamplight the old woman sat with bent head and folded hands for an instant; then they began their supper.

Her heart was filled with a great pure joy. How peacefully they were sitting together at their simple evening meal, each with her innocent glass of water and wine next to her plate; and Jozette, who ate as daintily as she had ever taught any of her most fastidious little pupils, chattered away so pleasantly meanwhile.

Oh, if only she were rich. She would like to keep this girl with her for ever!

And again she thought—supposing I could lead her back to the narrow road, now that I have her alone! . . .

When the dish of *blanquette* was almost empty, and Jozette had refused a second helping twice, the little old woman got up herself to brush the crumbs from the tablecloth, and brought out as dessert a piece of Gruyère cheese and a plate with three peaches.

She would have liked to ask how long the two painters

were to be away, but could not bring herself to do this. And while Jozette cleared the table, her little bird's head was full of ideas, which made her cheeks rosy and herself quiet and absent-minded.

She must not leave her alone too much, that was certain; she calculated as to whether her purse would allow her to have her to dinner every day. . . . It might be a little difficult, but not impossible; also a vague medley of proverbs ran through her mind, something about winning with love, and making virtue attractive. . . . Should she take her out for an afternoon? But the question was, where to go—the Louvre? . . . But in the Louvre there were so many improper pictures—perhaps they would not be good for Jozette; she did not know the way well there, either. . . . “Carnavalet” came to her mind, but she was not quite sure about its situation. She thought it must be far away; she had only been driven there. And suddenly she remembered—“Cluny.” How stupid not to have thought of it sooner. “Cluny,” so old and so interesting, and so near at the same time. Yet—perhaps Jozette was too uneducated to appreciate it. . . . Again she tried to think of something. Her cheeks flamed red under the dark sunken eyes. It was difficult. . . . Suddenly she had an inspiration. . . .

“Jozette,” said she, full of enthusiasm, “I have thought of a plan . . .”

II

On the following evening, a Sunday evening, the two little “Ghosts,” on account of the unusual event more sober and serious than ever, stood at Mademoiselle Villetard's door; they had been invited there. Shyly they crept inside, noiselessly arranged their grey cotton frocks on the chairs which had been set in readiness for them, and with sly curious glances peered round the room where, for the sake

of cosiness, only a reading-lamp burned on a corner table.

Two respectable girls, two models of devotion to duty and simple contentment, they could but be an excellent example for Jozette, Mademoiselle Villetard thought; and with great tact she had planned the meeting. Mademoiselle Cateau and Mademoiselle Léontine had been asked to come at half-past seven—so that they might have time to settle down—at eight o'clock she expected Jozette.

"I can understand how delightful it must be," Mademoiselle Villetard remarked, brightly, "two sisters, always together—"

"We are cousins," interrupted the girls at the same time, rather snappily as if they had been put in the wrong.

"Really! . . . Ah! . . . Indeed!" Mademoiselle said, showing suitable surprise.

"We are often taken for sisters," said Cateau.

Cateau was the younger one. She had, in spite of her short figure, a broad face, of an even pallor, with a pair of thick, faded, pink lips; her large grey eyes were both dull and stern, and moved with difficulty under the heavy eyelids. Léontine was much handsomer. The short hair round her temples possessed a natural wave, and her nose was a little finer, but the eyes were of the same dull grey, and her lips only slightly more mobile and red. Both had little premature sharp lines from the corners of the nose to the mouth.

Uncomfortably they sat on their chairs as if they were on the point of getting up to go. They had each taken an identical white linen collar from a bag to embroider, but as the reading-lamp did not give enough light they allowed their work to repose drearily in their laps.

When Mademoiselle Villetard began to talk about their life in the hat-shop where they worked, they became a little more animated.

Léontine began a series of complaints about the *patronne*. Such a tiresome woman towards her workers! She always haggled about overtime paying . . . she even instituted fines. The *première première* herself got hauled over the coals. . . . "Do you remember this morning . . . those five centimes . . . how furious that little minx was . . . ?" she said with a sly giggle to her cousin.

Then Cateau was exceedingly bitter on the subject of the arrogance of the saleswomen. They could not sew a lining in a hat, and yet they looked down their noses at the whole workshop. . . . Ridiculous! just because, dressed in pretty frocks, they trailed about the show-rooms from morning till night.

The two girls, with many stealthy glances and hidden jokes, lived, in those conversations, a separate life of ideas and interests and underhand actions.

"Indeed, indeed!" said Mademoiselle Villetard now and then. "Indeed!" It was a good thing she thought that those two had been able to pour out their hearts beforehand. . . . It was not in Jozette's line at all.

It came to her vaguely that the two girls were rather different from what she had judged them to be, after an occasional desultory chat on the balcony, but she did not allow herself to be disappointed. She got up to light the large lamp. Cateau and Léontine immediately threw themselves with sulky ardour upon their work.

Then at half-past eight Jozette arrived; she wore a white lawn blouse and white linen skirt, and apologized for being so late. . . . She had been writing a note to Roubaix. Mademoiselle Villetard's face clouded over. Surely that could not be so very urgent, she thought. But her mind was very clear as to the aim of the evening, so that she was able to go on giving her undivided cheerful attention to the various happenings. Her manner of introduction, she told

herself, had been very tactful. Just a word about being neighbours, not at all forced, and a little genial gesture, so that all were bound to feel at home.

The two little ghosts from under their half-closed eyelids promptly exchanged their customary long glance of mutual understanding. "Need you ask . . . we said it to each other . . . that girl will be there too. . . ."

Year after year, through long days in the workshop, they had been accustomed to this secret talking together. . . .

Mademoiselle Villetard thought she noticed something suspicious; she had not really seen anything, only felt it. She blushed and became more observant. . . .

The gaze of each girl on its way to the other suddenly stopped short in its sly progress, peered innocently and stupidly straight ahead, and then went straight back to the work.

Jozette did not understand at all why those two stiff sullen pokers suddenly had taken up their abode with Mademoiselle Villetard.

But she was very friendly and responsive, because she noticed how the old lady did her best to bring about a pleasant general conversation and how difficult it was. Mademoiselle Villetard asked the ghosts and Jozette a question turn about. Jozette answered the ghosts and the ghosts answered each other.

"And do you not think it tiring to catch the bus every morning at half-past seven?"

"Oh no . . . do you think so, Cateau?"

Cateau shook her head. . . . "You don't either, do you?"

"But my little neighbour from the opposite side is up earlier than any of us, I believe," said Mademoiselle Villetard.

"Oh, only this summer! But I did that," Jozette explained to the two girls, "because afterwards it got so hot in our room. In the winter I am often very lazy."

At that "our room" the two took part in a little by-play of the eyes sideways across their embroidery, then glanced quickly at Jozette to see what her face looked like as she made the remark. Then, falteringly, the conversation drifted at last to the new "working-girl" restaurants, and for a moment they all chatted quite happily.

Mademoiselle Villetard rejoiced in the harmony; after all, she had been right. They would take to each other, if only she did not give up hope. She poured out another glass of sweet lemonade.

For the first time that evening the little ghosts put aside their work; their fingers, unaccustomed to being empty, fidgeted rather nervously as they laid down the law, and their tense foreheads grew flushed.

"Don't all shopkeepers get rich? Every shop should be run by the people themselves, and then the employées would be better paid," said Léontine, who was best at arguing.

"Of course, of course," Jozette agreed.

Surely now the moment had come when they would make friends, thought Mademoiselle Villetard, who had watched carefully the various shades in each mind. With the shrewdness of the pedagogue she remarked: "The old heart of a working-girl will always show, won't it, Jozette?" and to the girls, "Mademoiselle used to belong to the trade, too."

Jozette blushed deeply. Why did Mademoiselle say that? Did she not understand that this was very unpleasant for her? The two, suddenly alert, leered at each other. Do you hear that? And the other answered with a treacherous expression in her watery eyes: "Well, she belongs to another trade now!"

An angry furrow appeared between Jozette's eyes.

"Were you a milliner, too?" Cateau inquired, sweetly incredulous.

"No, a corset-maker," Jozette said, haughtily.

A renewed glance back and forwards; they considered a *corsetière* far beneath a modiste. "Yes, yes, a *corsetière*, of course," said their lips, moving almost imperceptibly.

Jozette felt her anger rising, but just as she was about to give vent to a bitter retort she and Mademoiselle Villetard looked at each other; Mademoiselle Villetard saw only then how hurt Jozette was, and Jozette's pity was roused by the old woman's contrite disconcerted eyes. They were both silent, and eyed each other askance; the ghosts sat for a moment with astonished triumphant faces, as if they had had the last word in a difficult argument.

There was a marked sense of strain till the end of the evening. They talked about the shops in the neighbourhood. The ghosts were inclined to be dogmatic, which irritated Mademoiselle Villetard, and sat primly back in their chairs as if they did not intend to get up for several hours.

Jozette, her temper not yet properly under control, made a frank statement about Aristide, hoping to annoy the two girls. She only saw the indolent grey eyes light up with a desire to hear more. Mademoiselle Villetard looked more pathetic than ever, so Jozette cooled down and came to the conclusion that there was not much fun in that.

The small clock on the corner cupboard struck half-past nine. The ghosts worked with unflagging zeal at their collars, borrowed each other's bodkin to make the holes nice and round, and peeped at one another's work to see whether the other one was not a scallop ahead. Jozette got up first and said a sullen good-bye, but Mademoiselle was noticeably sweet to her and asked her to dinner the next day. She was very disappointed with those girls; they were so uneducated and so aggressive! In the end she had to give them a hint about early rising the next day, in order to get them to go. She was very tired.

III

On the following days, Jozette went about from morning to evening with the old lady: she arranged everything about the little housekeeping, and Mademoiselle declared that never yet in all her life had she had such delicious meals, or been waited on so beautifully. Once Jozette brought her a basket of pears, and another day half a melon to help to defray her expenses. Mademoiselle Villetard was much touched by this.

With unflinching devotion she persisted in her steady attempts at conversion; all through the mornings and the afternoons and the evenings she practised a quiet persuasion and never ceased trying to influence, although the evening with the milliners had taught her to be more careful, but on the fourth day she plucked up courage to ask frankly: "Dearie, would you like me to see if I could find you a situation with nice people? You are so clever; you could manage a household of eight children."

"What about Aristide though?" Jozette asked in amazement.

"Patience, patience!" said the little woman to herself, "right will triumph slowly but surely."

Jozette, alone with the little Villetard in her own surroundings—little Villetard in her spotted or flowered black cotton morning jacket or her odd black silk house dresses, old-fashioned patched-up clothes, dating from the time when she lived with wealthy families; Mademoiselle Villetard with all the peculiarities of a spoiled old woman, her little indolent ways, her childlikeness, her small vanities about the things she did not know, or could not do, her slightly affected words, which seemed to belong to her—thought her once more the dearest old lady she had ever seen. "You see," Mademoiselle Villetard was in the habit of saying,

"I never have had to do that myself"; or "Of course, Jozette, I don't suppose I shall ever learn how to brush my own shoes properly," with an exaggerated and self-satisfied emphasis on that *Ever*, in which could be heard her entire life of being waited on and being looked after and being independent.

Sometimes, in the midst of the trivial peaceful incidents of such a day, Jozette would be overcome with a wild desire to run away or to do something mad, to laugh out loud or to sing; often also an empty homesick longing for Aristide's eyes and voice, his gentle hands and his dear face crept over her, but that wildness calmed down, and the homesickness became a peaceful love deep down in her heart, whenever the old woman, with her quiet and kindly ways, touched her.

And during the long intimate evening hours, Jozette spoke more freely about her youth.

From her eleventh to her thirteenth year she had spent her days basting the coarse thick seams of cheap corsets for the workers at the sewing-machines. Later on she had come to a large workshop in the Rue Caulaincourt, where she had perfected herself in the trade.

Neither of them mentioned the thing which followed. Every day Mademoiselle Villetard thought she saw herself nearer her goal. She would win this little soul, she often thought with joyous piousness and faith. Did not Jozette all day long fill this cage of virtuous living with her twittering and warbling? How cheerful she was, and how attentive and full of ardour and goodwill! Jozette was her sheep, her lost sheep. Oh, if only she might lead her back to the arms of the Good Shepherd!

And very cautiously, so as not to offend her Catholic susceptibilities, she began to talk about religion—the love towards God which must humble man, and the rich reward

which would surely come sooner or later to the righteous ones.

"To live at peace with God, and with your conscience, that is the greatest happiness on earth," she said with glowing conviction.

Jozette always became a little subdued as a result of these remarks: they sounded so strange, so far away and yet so familiar, belonging to the time when she was about eleven or twelve, and was being prepared for her first Communion by the Chaplain of Notre Dame de Clignacourt. "Yes, of course . . ." she would agree vaguely. "Of course." She failed to notice Mademoiselle Villetard's deeper meaning.

Then, unexpectedly, two days before they had arranged to come, the two boys surprised Jozette.

"Roubaix is boring after a week when you are used to Paris," they said, "and here we are!"

Jozette was as if drunk with happiness. . . . Standing in the open door of Mademoiselle Villetard's room she kissed Aristide on his eyes and his mouth; she had jumped up the moment she heard their voices on the stair.

"At last! At last, my darling!" she said passionately.

"Jozette!" Mademoiselle Villetard's warning voice came cuttingly from the bedroom to which she had hurriedly escaped.

"I will be back in a moment!" Jozette called from the landing, and she dragged Aristide off to their room.

When an hour later she wanted to go and apologize to the little old woman, she had gone out; at any rate the room door was locked.

CHAPTER 11

AT first, they had said at the workshop that, this year, they were going to take a holiday on All Souls' Day, but, by Jove, what a fuss the boss had made!—" *Sacré nom*, another day to blazes! The roof was not yet on the house. . . . What was he to do if it began to freeze the next week? . . . He was surprised that they even consented to work on All Saints' Day. Lazy ruffians, that's what they were," and furiously he banged his fists on the trestle. "Why did they not take All Saints' as well, and go the round of the pubs so that they could lie in their beds and rest on All Souls'?"

Finally, the foreman promised him that for once the work would be continued on both days.

In the morning, before he took himself off, Louis told Madame Carpentier the tale—he was the model of a sensible workman; all the same, he was absolutely set on his dozen or so extra holidays. Madame Carpentier tried to comfort him, and, with characteristic generosity to her own kind, she poured him out another full cup of *café au lait*.

Quite contentedly he gulped down his bowl of steaming coffee, threw his grey canvas workman's bag across his shoulder, and departed.

Dark clouds hung low over the blocks of houses, which were damp after the night rains; there was a sharp nip in the still air, and the light was dim as though strewn with a fine dust. In the old Rue de Grenelle they were busy building a few storeys on to a house. As Louis stood on his scaffolding, waiting because the hodman had not yet filled his tray, he saw how a slight breeze coming from the west

brought a little movement into the heavy mass of clouds, the greyness broke and opened out a whitish vista, and thin mists scurried past.

There was not much traffic yet in the street beneath him, so that the sounds of work, the clicking of iron against iron and stone, the scraping along gritty cement could be distinguished separately in the morning quiet. By this Louis knew that several fellows must have stayed at home. A little later, at about nine o'clock, the sun appeared like a silver disk behind a thin haze, which became gradually thinner, and just as the first pale rays of light and shade gave life to the street, a little woman walked along the opposite pavement, carrying under her arm a pot of bright red flowers which, as they rocked to and fro, caught darting spots and stars of sunshine.

By degrees a little more bustle came into the street. The busy day began. Then, by and by, there were huge patches of deep blue in the sky, and the wind, keen and invigorating, wafted along many undefined scents, as if it had come blowing across a large forest.

"*Sacré chien de vent*," muttered Louis. He felt as if his hair were being caressed. Ah . . . to loaf about in this cool breeze . . . he felt like running away!

From his scaffolding, in the narrow Rue de Grenelle, he pictured a bird's-eye view of Paris: festive signs everywhere, crowded streets, people, cabs, flowers, carts and booths with flowers and all the cafés full. Suddenly he decided to knock off. Stealthily he clambered down the ladders, smuggled away the bag with his dungarees and tools, pulled on his jacket and slipped off. . . .

Outside in the street a number of people had just swerved round the corner towards the *Bon Marché*. He was pleased as Punch with his holiday before him, and strolled along in the same direction, his hands in his pockets and his back hunched up.

A row of four women walked in front of him: they were soberly dressed; between their arms and across their shoulders he saw ever now and then the bright gleam of flowers; there was a subdued happy activity in their gait. Evidently they were going to Montparnasse. The *Bon Marché* was closed; in front of it at the corner of the small square stood a flower-seller, and a little old lady, pressing close to her breast a bunch of waxy roses, sauntered out of sight, laboriously putting away her purse. In the narrow Rue St. Placide a sort of procession formed itself, which got lost in the wide Rue de Renne, among much other traffic. He went through dirty slummy streets; the sun had hidden itself again, and many a woman on her way to the churchyard looked pale and sad behind her black veil. Louis began to feel out of place: he had never yet been to a cemetery on All Souls' Day; why should you go if you came from the *Enfants Trouvés*? He only knew the festive part of it . . . and when he saw two young women, holding handkerchiefs to tearful eyes, laden with large bunches of marguerites, he became suddenly sentimental. . . . He would like to have some one in a churchyard, to take flowers there, to look after a grave, with a photograph of the deceased in a glass case. . . .

He stood still at a wreath-shop on the Boulevard Edgard-Quinet, almost opposite the cemetery gate. It was a cavernous shop with a few crosses and twisted pillars and urns with cloths made of freestone. At the windows a show of bright yellow everlasting wreaths decorated with black cardboard letters—"Repos," "Adieu,"—and wreaths made of glittering painted tin, tin camomiles, tin leaves, tin ribbons: "Re . . . quiez . . ." Louis read. "Latin, I suppose," he thought with lugubrious awe. . . . "To my mother"; "Eternal regret," . . . and round a crown of forget-me-nots "To our sister—never forgotten." The idea of going to see what Montparnasse was like had now lost its attraction; he had

also noticed that it was nearly half-past eleven, and he decided that the best thing he could do was to go and have a hearty meal somewhere. In the neighbourhood of the station he sought out a "Cabbies' Rendezvous," where he consumed half a fried rabbit and drank a pint of red wine with it, but the wine was more heady than the kind he usually drank, and as he came out of the close stuffy atmosphere of the little hall on to the street in the sudden blinding rays of a piercing midday sun, he felt slightly indisposed and a trifle unsteady on his legs. All at once, at the corner of the Avenue du Main, he saw Leguënne and his friend Bonneau coming along the pavement.

They had been out together since ten o'clock in the morning, had stopped at half a dozen public-houses, and the two jolly fellows were marching along the Boulevard Vaugirard, both as cool and fresh as if they had newly stepped out of their beds.

They glanced at each other, then nodded good-naturedly and hailed Louis: "Hi, Louis! . . . Bonjour, Louis,"—Leguënne had met Louis in the loge; Bonneau did not know him so well. They greeted each other with great effusiveness and much boisterous hand-shaking: Louis became quite emotional over it. He said he would stand them a drink.

Leguënne, who knew all the public-houses in the vicinity, suggested going to the *Chat qui Pelote*, on the Place Vavin. Ten minutes later they found themselves sitting at a window out of the sun, beside the zinc counter. . . . "Wine . . . nothing but good wine . . ." said the sophisticated Leguënne. They had the whole day before them . . . and he ordered three jugs.

His stiff dark-brown hat tilted a little to the back of his high bald forehead, his muddy skin, taut from the eyes to the jaw, with a couple of red spots below the rather sunken temples, he lolled negligently in the chair, resting one arm on

the table, and told with dry humour tales at which the other two roared with laughter.

Robert, who did not say much, sat comfortably back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, his best soft hat set lightly to one side on his thick, dark, curly hair; he had a full plump face, cheeks of a healthy red, slightly bronzed along the small dark moustache.

But Louis, his cap fatuously over his face, swung on his chair like a foolish clown, who did not belong to the party. There was a vacant expression in his little grey eyes; every now and then he gave an abrupt little laugh, then looked at the others in astonishment and laughed again. Sometimes he would have a sudden brain wave, and for no reason at all, in the middle of a conversation, pat Leguënné or Bonneau on the shoulder, saying, "Holla! bon bourge!" or "Voilà, mon vieux . . ." then gaze contentedly into space. . . . Occasionally he made an attempt to start a story himself, but could not manage to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, so that Leguënné, egged on by Robert's good-natured jeers, at once interrupted him with a new tale.

When he brought the second lot of drinks the innkeeper, as was his custom, stood and chatted at their table: he leered at Louis with some surprise, but Leguënné and Bonneau he treated with respect. They were boys after his heart. . . . Bonneau, in his abrupt manner, enumerated their achievements of the morning: "A 'quart' at *le père Boubolinet*, Rue St. Jacques, a 'quart' in the *Maquerceau Doré*, a pint between them at *Bonvalet's* in the Rue de la Gaité; another in the *Taverne Barbotte*, where they had eaten their midday dinner, and a 'quart' at *Touriel's* in the Rue Mizon. . . ."

"Sapristi," said the innkeeper, and related a number of anecdotes on the subject of clever drinking-feats, which he had recently come across.

At about two o'clock they got up. Louis, who, during the last half-hour had enjoyed forty winks, was once more

moderately sober: he only complained about the heat of the day. . . . He jogged along as if he had very little control over his limbs; the two others also walked rather stiff-kneed, but they kept up well, and meandered happily down the Rue de Bréa.

Leguënné, always gentlemanly, did not say much on the street; as a precautionary measure they took Louis between them, and like three well-behaved comrades, they remembered to move out of the way of the passing women.

Then, on the Boulevard Raspail, they suddenly ran into Carpentier, who had been sent to Montparnasse by Hortense, with some flowers.

"Hallo, Émile . . . Bonjour, Carpentier," the three shouted. They shook hands, and again there was a great display of heartiness. Carpentier, in his black morning coat, felt very hot; the afternoon sun, between gusts of a sharp biting wind, shone fiercely, as if more rain were coming; he tilted his high-crowned bowler hat farther back, displaying a deep purple dent, and above it a strip of shiny red heat-rash.

"Let's have a drink," said Leguënné. And he conducted them all a few houses farther back, to the café at the corner of the Boulevard Montparnasse.

Carpentier hesitated for a moment; but Leguënné and Bonneau assumed their most hypocritically sanctimonious faces, each looking as dignified as any father of a family on his way to the Bois de Boulogne on a Sunday. He did not mind about Louis, who behaved like a hen with a cold the minute he had drunk two glasses of wine. . . .

"Yes, let's have a drink," he said with conviction. But no sooner were they seated with their four half-pint jugs in front of them than he found himself involved in a race with Leguënné. Carpentier was in a fix; for many a long day he had nourished a respectable indignation for the ne'er-do-well, who ill-treated his wife, but this feeling was now

mixed with a vague envy of this clever man-about-town opposite him. Somewhat depressed, he was aware that his superiority as the house-autocrat was oozing away from him . . . but the dickens! he was not going to allow that gentleman to take the wind out of his sails. . . .

He tried to brace himself up to witty repartee and queer stories, and in order to get into full swing he gulped down a good glass of wine. . . .

Every now and then his squint eye opened very wide and shut again with a foolish wink, as if it suddenly became embarrassed over the quick retorts which the mouth uttered.

They ordered another pint of wine between them. But Leguënné, who had found a rival, outdid himself when, with his hat still farther back on his bald skull, and his small-pupilled pale eyes deep-set under the brow, he re-enacted a farce on the subject of an intercepted love-scene between a charwoman and the foreman at his printing-office, while he, as sole actor, altered his voice every now and then, and in a covert manner insinuated a hundred doubtful jokes; Carpentier considered himself beaten.

He listened open-mouthed: "Sacré bon-sort!" Where did that chap learn his French? . . . What style! what a delivery! . . . You would not find anything like that in the newspapers, and on the stage you would see nothing better! . . . Here was a man who ought to be in Parliament.

In the meantime, Louis was pulling at his sleeve, quietly and persistently. . . . He was once more sentimental.

"You remember Jean Pichard . . . Émile . . . tell me . . . Jean Pichard. . . ." As Carpentier paid no attention to him, he muttered on: "Poor man . . . poor Jean Pichard. . . ."

"What! Jean Pichard . . ." yelled Robert. He became rather quick-tempered when he had drunk too much, and when the other one was on the point of opening his mouth

again, he banged his fist on the table . . . but all at once he controlled his anger, for at the table outside the window two good-looking girls settled themselves.

Leguënné whistled softly between his teeth, but when the girls obligingly came and stood about them, he remarked with a sardonic laugh:

"No, thank you, my beauties . . . we don't require your wares!"

The wenches turned away furiously, but the smaller and prettier of the two, a pert little rascal, said across her shoulder:

"We don't sell to bald-heads."

That did not please Leguënné, and, wishing to show off, he ordered two absinths from the counter.

Carpentier began to look very subdued. . . . By Jove! . . . girls and absinth. . . . He fidgeted about on his chair and began to listen to what Louis had to say for himself. He was still on the same subject. . . .

"Jean Pichard . . . the friend of Titi the hunchback . . . who is dead. . . . Do you remember? . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Carpentier vaguely. His head was already rather muddled. Still, he could just remember a young fellow, with whom they had dined once in a restaurant, and who had fallen from a scaffolding; it had all happened years ago. He could not for the life of him understand what Jean Pichard had to do with him, anyhow. . . .

"Poor soul!" sighed Louis, in the depths of depression; his eyes were wandering and vacant, his mouth quivered as if he were going to weep. . . . Carpentier felt a lump in his throat himself. And then the other hiccupped away about how pleasant life was . . . when with friends . . . a glass of wine . . . quite decently . . . and how terrible it must be . . . if in your thirtieth year . . . you fell from a scaffolding. . . .

"He is absolutely tight!" Carpentier thought with a start;

then he looked at Bonneau and Leguënné. . . . These sly dogs were tickling the girls' necks with spills of newspaper; the two tried to pretend they did not notice it, while Leguënné suppressed a tormenting sneer each time one of them, with a conscious gesture, tried to ward him off with her hand.

Carpentier became a purple red, and his blind eye trembled incessantly. . . . He suddenly thought with a terror, which brought out beads of perspiration on his forehead, that his son might pass, or any of the people in his house. Then resolutely he got up and emptied his glass in one gulp.

"Nom de nom!" he swore furiously. He noticed a sickly sweet taste of aniseed in his throat. . . .

"Salaud! You have put absinth into it!" he screamed at Leguënné, whose glass was almost empty; Bonneau's was still nearly full. But Leguënné, with an impudent set face, pretended to be a paragon of virtue:

"What? I put absinth in any one's wine? . . . Tell him, Robert . . . you were looking. . . ."

Robert shook his head stupidly; when Leguënné looked at him both burst into a fit of mad laughter. The two girls outside the window also nearly choked in their efforts to suppress their giggles.

"Sacré Dieu!" Carpentier bawled. His eye glared wide and white as if he were about to have a fit with rage.

A number of boys stood still on the pavement and stared; also one or two cabbies who were walking up and down beside their horses. Louis noticed it and began to shake Carpentier by the arm: "Émile! Émile then!" His manner was so tragic that the girls in front of the window, who had turned right round by now, rolled against each other with laughter. . . .

"Émile, the day of the dead! the day of Jean Pichard! Émile, the dead! . . ." Louis wailed on.

Carpentier, in desperation, sank back into his chair, almost

subsiding beside it: he did not know where to hide himself. And Leguënne, who was also getting tired of it, motioned to the girls to stop, then drew the little casement curtain, and thrusting his hand at Carpentier across the table, said: "Don't lose your temper. He was blessed if he had poured absinth into the wine—how could Carpentier think such a thing? They had only laughed about his startled face. . . ."

Carpentier, still trembling with excitement and a sense of shame, allowed his hand to be shaken. Waves of drowsy drunkenness surged through his body and befogged his thoughts; he slid down a little in his chair and looked as if he were about to fall asleep.

Bonneau and Leguënne glanced at each other once more, with a sly wink: they themselves were also somewhat overcome with the heady mixture.

All four sat for a time unnoticed, dozing themselves sober; the girls in front of the window had disappeared. As the afternoon wore on, some drinkers standing about the counter filled the pub with smoke and noise: the sun had disappeared.

Robert, seeing how Leguënne's head began to nod, quietly poured the rest of his absinth outside, then he folded his arms on his chest and closed his eyes.

After a little Leguënne perked up again, cautiously lifting his bumping head from his shirt-front. . . . Not caring to admit that he had been half-seas over, he opened and shut his eyes furtively, but when he saw that the other three men were still napping and nodding, he frightened them back to their senses with a shrill howl like that of a wild beast.

"Two legs broken and his spine . . ." lamented Louis, upon whom drink had had a melancholy effect that day, and who was still fussing about his Jean Pichard's accident. . . . "Deep under the sod . . . far away from his friends . . . in a churchyard behind the ramparts. . . ."

Past the window came two men, with a large wreath of

red and white flowers between them. The bright effect of this flowery token suddenly roused Carpentier out of his drowsy stupor, and Louis still rambled thickly:

"Let's take him a wreath. . . . Yes . . . yes . . . let's take him a wreath. . . ."

And Carpentier, wide awake now, shouted all at once with wild enthusiasm, "A wreath for Jean Pichard!"

Then it also penetrated into Leguënné's sodden head: that was an excellent idea! . . . "By Jove, that was a suggestion! . . . The four of them would take a wreath . . . a damned good joke!"

He slapped Carpentier on the shoulder, so that he lost his balance and landed against the table.

"*En route!*" he ordered.

They felt for their purses, fumbled for money to pay . . . it was a long business.

Leguënné and Bonneau, remembering their reputations, were not daunted by six pints of wine: they shook their heads, turned up their moustaches, and prepared for the fray. . . .

Walking a little stiffly but as straight as if nothing but bread and milk had passed their lips that day, Bonneau took charge of Carpentier. Leguënné brought up the rear with Louis.

Before a wreath-shop on the corner of the Boulevard Edgard Quinet they stopped and took counsel together: it was the same shop at which Louis had stood in the morning. A medium-sized wreath of nothing but black bead decorations in the centre, inside a border of dark violets, within white letters "au revoir," drew their attention immediately. It was marked eight francs. Louis was moved to tears over the beauty of this wreath.

"Two francs each. . . . Surely . . . on All Souls' Day . . . they surely owed that . . . to a friend . . . poor soul . . . who had come . . . to such a tragic end."

He forgot entirely that Leguënne and Bonneau had never even seen this Jean Pichard. But they, in the haziness of their intoxication, had become quite familiar with the incident: they gripped their purses, brought out their two francs with the exception of Carpentier who, when it came to paying, tried to wriggle out of it. . . .

But Bonneau got angry. "Sacré nom! if he could not even afford two francs for an unfortunate friend . . . well, he would just like to say . . . friendship . . . 'l'amitié' . . . 'l'amitié!' . . ." He made a convincing gesture, but, never a great talker, he left it at that.

Leguënne, with the eight francs in his hand, went into the shop and bought the wreath.

When he came outside again, they ranged themselves in a circle in the middle of the pavement, in order to admire their purchase at close quarters; they fingered the beady ornaments and the flowers and the white letters: Louis' little eyes gleamed with joy.

When several passers-by remained standing and looked into the circle, Leguënne hastily put back the wreath into its already half-torn paper bag.

"*En route*," he ordered again, and to Carpentier and Louis: "Where are we going?"

Louis and Carpentier looked at each other.

"To Mont Rouge," said Émile.

"No, no," said Louis, "to Ivry."

Bonneau burst into such a loud guffaw of laughter that the lady in the wreath-shop came out on to the pavement to find out what was the matter.

Leguënne sniggered, and in his exuberance of spirits pushed his straw hat a little farther back on his bald crown.

"To Ivry," Louis shouted again. . . . Surely he would know where his friend Jean Pichard lay buried.

But Carpentier swore that at the funeral he had followed the hearse to the Porte d'Orléans.

"La Porte d'Ivry," the other one persisted stubbornly.

"We are going to Ivry," Leguënne decided with a theatrical wave of his arm.

They walked on—he with the wreath, and Louis beside him. The little altercation and the arrangements had made all four once more moderately sober; the chill moist autumn air under the plane-trees, almost stripped of their shrivelled yellow leaves, did them good; the sky was full of clouds.

Even Carpentier walked rigid and correct beside Bonneau, but he was still grumbling about the two francs which he had thrown away, and about Mont Rouge, where they would be forced to go in the end. Every now and then, in the heat of an argument, he would bump against Robert.

They walked down the Boulevard Raspail and along the Place Denfert-Rochereau.

There, in front of the little café Reluquard, stood the crippled innkeeper at his post by the door of his rural verandah. Whenever he caught sight of the friends he limped to the corner table with its two chairs, and clattering the iron noisily on the stones, he placed two more chairs at the next table.

"Look here," said the noble Leguënne, "you cannot refuse a cripple anything," and he called a halt. The innkeeper blinked cunningly with his roguish eye, and limped inside to fetch a pint of his best wine.

A little laboriously the four worked their stiff legs under the green leaf of the table. The wreath, which in the meantime had parted company from its paper, was placed on the outside windowsill. The little garland of pansies and the snow-white "au revoir" peeped out between Carpentier's dented bowler and the high crown of Leguënne's straw hat.

"Au revoir," giggled a couple of naughty minxes, who passed by. They waved their hands and almost choked with laughing. This annoyed Leguënne, and he placed the wreath on the floor; but Reluquard's wine was a mild in-

offensive tippie which gave pleasant thoughts. And because of this they decided to get outside another pint.

"But then, we must have some food," Leguënne announced, and as a man of experience he explained: "You must never drink all the afternoon without eating anything. . . . What about a few mussels? . . . Eating fish is the best way to cheat the devil."

In front of the large café next door, he had already spotted, under the canvas in the corner, the chestnut-roaster's steaming stove; above and behind it, baskets stacked with mussels and oranges. He placed the wine bottle on the table and, carrying the tray under his arm, he walked, with the mincing footstep of a waiter, amidst the stamping and cheering of the others to the next café.

Five minutes later, trying to balance it on one hand, he returned, his tray laden with a pile of lead-grey mussels, and a number of blackish-brown chestnuts in a paper bag. What a success!

They all came round, and Leguënne gave them each their share. They became quite subdued. They prised the half-open shells apart, and picked and pecked to the best of their ability, with their fiddling fingers at the beard of the little lump of whitish-yellow fish.

Louis, who had only tasted raw mussels and was too dazed to notice what the others were doing, gobbled them up neck and crop, pulling agonized faces as he munched. Now it was time for the hot chestnuts: they peeled off the cracked shells, and cooled the hot firm bits in their mouths with sips of red wine.

In conclusion they had another glass all round and, obviously refreshed and only a very little more drunk than when they came, they departed.

Looking tiny beside the gigantic bronze lion of Belfort, the trams marked "Montrouge-Gare de l'Est" roared past like green beetles.

"If only we were going to Mont-Rouge," Carpentier began to whine again.

"Keep your mouth shut," Leguënné snarled.

They reached the wide deserted-looking Boulevard St. Jacques—with its bits of old walls belonging to convent-like buildings and a tumble-down country house, with a neglected garden in front of it. And straight ahead, in the gravel centre path of the sloping boulevard, like an endless vermilion-arched avenue, was the metropolitan viaduct.

At the barrier which checked their progress, they stood still for a moment, and looking into its depths saw how the rails glide out of the tunnel and speed away into a dim distant perspective between iron spars and iron spans, a confusion of crossed supports and bolts covered with red lead—the boulevard beneath, with its isolated blocks of houses amid lower structures, sank away, as it were, into a deep valley on either side.

They descended, and finding themselves under the viaduct, their sodden heads became entirely muddled with all the red arches beyond red arches, grey arches beyond grey arches, under a roof of perpetually changing red bars. Louis began to wail about the dreadfulness of all those trains which would hurl themselves down there, and Bonneau could not stop a lamentable raving about the under-and-above-the-ground of the above-and-under-the-ground railway.

Leguënné roused himself for an instant to the discovery that they were all as drunk as lords, but that they must get out of this. Stumbling along, they zigzagged through the wide cobbled street, and kept to the deserted pavement, close to the blind walls under the lean leafless trees . . . and then, after a while, from the sky which had by degrees become very cloudy, a dreary drizzle began to fall. They felt

cold and put up the collars of their coats and pulled their hats and caps well into their eyes.

Pathetically, all four in single file, Leguënne leading with the black beaded object dangling listlessly on his arm, they trudged along one side of the wide outside boulevard, where there was not a soul to be seen, quite forgetting about their respectability, surging from right to left across the entire width of the pavement, barging into each other and in front of one another's feet, cursing and jabbering under their breath, stupid ramblings of their fuddled brains.

The dim perspective of the street narrowed in the fine grey mist of the ever-thickening drizzle.

It was Leguënne who was the first to throw up the sponge: "What the hell—did they think he was going to walk about in this rain any longer. . . . He was going to take shelter. . . ."

"There . . . under the bridge . . ." Bonneau suggested vaguely. But Leguënne tried to explain to him that it would be no use—could he not see that there was no roof to it? They must try and find a pub.

But Carpentier and Louis, spluttering, were in favour of walking on—the cemeteries closed at five o'clock.

"To hell with your cemeteries," growled Bonneau.

Leguënne and he, knowing the ropes, peered along the boulevard and into the little side-sheds, but they were strangers in this quarter and could not discover anything in the nature of a wine-shop.

Then Bonneau remembered having been to one somewhere in the beginning of the Avenue de Choisy.

"Come on," said Leguënne, and with weary unsteady legs shuffling over the slippery wet asphalt path, they managed to get to the end of the boulevard: Carpentier and Louis wandered along with them, somewhat comforted, because the same road led to the churchyard. . . .

But when coming closer they saw the lamps on the chilly deserted Place d'Italie, twinkling under the dark pink rain-clouds—and just a few houses farther on, a large duck, rocking to and fro in the wind on its iron bar, with an enticing screech—damn it! it was a pub!—then Leguënné and Bonneau, without any further deliberation, heaved themselves inside, and as they were in possession of the wreath, Louis and Carpentier could but follow in their wake.

Au Coco Blanc, belonging to Charles Bobillot, was a shabby tavern, the low-ceilinged narrow room was pervaded with a sooty twilight, a very dim light came in through a strip of barred window, showing in the far corner a shadowy black group of men, who, lit up by the ruddy flame of one small oil lamp, sat, playing at cards, enveloped in a thick cloud of smoke; nearer, at another little table, in the dim damp gloom, a number of Apaches hung about, drinking beer.

A rank, acid smell of perspiration and drink and smoke met them—they were not really in the habit of coming to this sort of haunt. . . . Even Leguënné and Bonneau in the day-time were always decent wine-bibbers, only frequenting them very occasionally after ten in the evening when the more respectable cafés were closed . . . but *Dieu de tonnerre*, they were half-dead with walking in the rain along that God-forsaken boulevard, which never came to an end! They just threw themselves round the first table, by the door, as muddy and wet as half-drowned poodles.

"Four cognacs," Leguënné ordered in desperation.

The innkeeper, with a wink at the impudent grinning ruffians beside them, dragged up a fifth chair for the wreath.

And no sooner were they seated than with a loud clatter which was suddenly followed by a deep silence a heavy downpour of rain, came splashing along the pavement, down which, in less than no time, a yellow rivulet rushed towards the boulevard.

Robert and Leguënne arranged themselves luxuriantly, well back on their chairs, as if they were not intending to move for at least an hour. When the wind, which came in at the window, drove the pattering rain-drops on to the window-sill, the innkeeper went and shut it.

Then, in the close vapour of the low room, it was very shortly a regular drunkards' rabble: they all jabbered away, shouting at each other, sometimes each bawling of their own accord. . . .

When the young scoundrels at the table behind them, in a quarrelsome fashion, began to make fun of the wreath, Leguënne immediately entered into conversation with them in the coarsest slang which did not convey anything to Louis and Carpentier: they did not even listen; it was just a general racket, from table to table, and Leguënne whistled shrilly between his fingers like an Apache, and told the innkeeper with a curse to give them beer, he would stand it. . . .

Carpentier kept on stammering "To-morrow, to-morrow morning . . . the wreath . . ." and Louis, twice over, tumbled against the chair on which the wreath lay, which made Robert nearly choke in his curses: the third time the thing rolled on to the floor and no one noticed it.

Finally the publican lit the large oil-lamp which hung from the ceiling, and in the shock of the sudden glare they noticed each other's dishevelled condition, and to a certain extent recovered themselves. Leguënne was white as a corpse round about his deep-set shining eyes, his pale grey forehead was clammy with sweat. Robert's swollen face was a purple-red with glistening cheeks; the light made Louis feel sick, and he rested his head on the table.

But Carpentier now became obsessed with the thought of getting home. With a terrified snigger he thought of Hortense . . . what a fury she would be in and how angry in bed. No, they must go home. . . . He nudged Louis, who

groaned miserably without raising his head; the two others were in no hurry at all.

But Carpentier was so insistent that Leguënne said, "Come along, then!" He was beginning to long for something to eat. Louis sat straight up with a dazed expression on his face. "Come along, then," Leguënne said again.

When it came to paying, the innkeeper demanded six francs.

"Fichez moi la paix! six francs? Fontu canaille!" shouted Leguënne and Bonneau simultaneously—six francs for six cognacs and a few glasses of beer! was he mad? But the fellow would not drop a centime—he had poured out two cognacs for each of them and two rounds of beer for the next table. . . .

"You gave us six cognacs, not eight," Leguënne yelled, "and I never noticed that second round of beer. . . ."

The publican shrugged his shoulders, and smiled a superior sardonic smile.

"Six francs," he repeated insolently, quite imperturbable. The card-players in the corner of the room suddenly burst forth into a loud brawl: "Bobillot," they shouted, "Bobillot!" A chair clattered down, and a slap on the table sent the flame of the lamps suddenly upwards, releasing a ball of ruddy smoke.

While the innkeeper was away, the four gazed at each other stupidly, amid the sly hits and scornful jeers of the gang of thieves behind them. Then they made some rapid calculations, while their bewildered minds tried to work out a cunning scheme. Louis alone was in the clouds.

The publican returned. "Well?" he nagged.

Leguënne, who wanted to save a little money for the evening, exerted himself enough to rummage with two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and fish out a franc, which he laid on the table and said that this was all he had left. But Carpentier, whilst they were still at *Reluquard's*, had

smuggled the entire contents of his purse into his tobacco-pouch—he was by no means too drunk to remember this. . . .

“Nothing . . . nothing,” he said, holding out his open purse for the others to see, with a pitiful face. He was laughing to himself over this clever dodge; nevertheless, he was terrified that they would find him out. When he began to think that Leguënne did not trust him, he threw the flat black leather object on to the table, and banged it with his fist:

“Nothing . . . nothing! . . .” he shouted anew.

Louis, who, huddling to one side, was snoring with his mouth open, had his pockets ransacked by Leguënne and the innkeeper. They found twenty centimes on him. Bonneau had already good-naturedly emptied his little money-bag, so that half the copper and nickel coins rolled on to the floor: bending and reaching laboriously, he managed to collect them.

So between them they had two-francs-forty. Leguënne and Carpentier were eyeing each other with sanctimonious faces.

“Nothing . . . nothing!” Carpentier shouted anew.

But the publican, himself a thick-set, sturdy fellow, roped in the toughs at the next table. . . .

“Two rounds of beer, of course two,” lied the rascals shamelessly; “and that gentleman himself”—one of them indicated Louis—“drank three cognacs,” they could swear to it.

Leguënne did not feel happy; he could not make up his mind as to whether he would pay the deficit out of his secret hoard. . . . If it came to fighting . . . the prig and the lout would be knocked out in a jiffy. . . . Bonneau alone would stand up to them . . . and if they were to find his own two-franc pieces, the knives would most certainly be brought out. . . . He rose.

Carpentier did the same. When he heard the coins jingling in his tobacco-pouch, he broke into a sweat of fear. Bonneau, a little silly and confused, remained sitting.

Then the innkeeper brushed the two-francs-forty, which were lying on the table, into the palm of his hand, picked up the wreath which had fallen under the chair, looked at it, and bent some of the little bead ornaments which had been trodden on to see if they could be got into shape again.

"I don't mind taking that . . ." he said with mealy-mouthed cuteness, his sly eyes leering covetously. Every day about ten funerals passed his door, he reflected; he would place the wreath on a table outside, as a bargain for "five francs." . . .

Leguënne forced his fuddled brain to think it over—then he fell back into his chair, slapped his hands on his knees, and laughed until he nearly burst, in loud shrill tones.

"Bigre! what a joke . . . au revoir! . . ." They were going to pay for their drinks with this piece of churchyard folly! . . .

He stamped his feet with amusement.

Bonneau suddenly roused himself, slapped his knees with his hands, and laughed his boisterous guffaw; the gang of thieves yowled in harmony.

Louis, waking up, stammered: "What—where?" Carpentier alone kept quiet, because that concealed money worried him too much.

But Leguënne, who was afraid that the farce would prove a failure in the end, began to insist on going.

"There,"—he pushed the wreath at the publican—"au revoir, beautiful wreath!"—and guided the three men to the door. A hurried hunt for Louis' cap, then laughing boisterously, the moist atmosphere drawing them like a magnet, they tottered out of the yellow thick fumes into the chill night.

"He, he, he, he!" Leguënne with his back against the

wall of the house, nearly tumbled down sideways with laughing.

"Fichtre! What a joke . . . now that that innkeeper was left there with the wreath! . . . The *sacré* wreath! . . . au revoir! au revoir! . . ." he began to hiccough.

Bonneau, in his deep bass voice, began to sing, waving his hat in the air:

"Au revei-re
Jean Picha-re."

But Carpentier and Louis leant against each other like two sheaves, and when Louis slipped and landed with one knee on the asphalt, Carpentier could not get him up again: his own legs ran away from each other. . . . Finally they sat side by side on the glassy paving-stones.

Bonneau and Leguënne hailed a *fiacre*, but they themselves were too far gone to heave the others into it—the cabby had to come down from his box; so they drove off, and Leguënne and Bonneau, arm-in-arm, meandered along the Place d'Italie, in quest of their dinner and a long evening excursion. Carpentier hung out of the cab window, and with desperate gesticulations, yelled for help as if he were being deported. Louis had collapsed limply into a corner, and fretted over Jean Pichard. . . . When, both of them sound asleep, they stopped at No. 118, Hortense, thoroughly alarmed, stood looking out at the door. She had waited for Carpentier ever since three o'clock in order to go out herself; later, after seven, she had kept the evening meal hot; neither her husband nor her lodger appeared. In a rage she sat down to her supper alone, and gave Ninouche the remainder. Then she began to fear a possible accident. . . . She was just on the point of going for her son.

One glance, by the light of the lantern, into the dusky cab was enough to make her understand. Helped by the

cabby, she dragged her husband out at the door opening.

Carpentier, his empty purse still in his hand, went on with his drunken by-play. "Nothing . . . nothing . . ."—but, suddenly terrified by Hortense's angry eyes, he began to defend himself tearfully: "Leguënnne . . . ce saligaud de Lenguënnne. . . ."

When she noticed some people coming down the stairs, she pushed him roughly inside behind the green serge bed-curtains, shoving him with all his clothes on to the pillows: she only removed his boots.

She went outside again to pay the cabby and to ask Antoine, the porter of "No. 120," to take pity on Louis. Her gestures were concise and decided, and in her mind was one passionate thought: the Leguënnnes must leave the house.

CHAPTER 12

I

CÉLESTIN stormed down the stairs like a madman. Jozette had complained that Lourty twice over had spoken to her in the deserted Rue Michelet so that in the end she was forced to take refuge in Millot's shop, because that peculiar man would insist on walking close behind—this must come to an end; Jozette must be able to walk safely on the road, by Jove!

And with hot-headed violence he set the bell on the fourth floor tinkling.

Madame Lourty herself opened the door. She was alone at home. With a gentle astonished resignation she asked him what he wanted.

Célestin was nonplussed for an instant; he had just been overcome with a vague wild desire "to put a stop to it" and had never considered what he would say and whom he would be likely to meet. In great confusion he requested a short interview.

Madame Lourty, with the same gentle astonishment, nodded her assent; she preceded him to the dining-room, where she gave him a chair at the table, took another one herself, and waited for him to speak.

When Célestin, in that very bright, somewhat sparsely furnished, chilly room—for there was no fire yet—sat facing the little woman who, with her handsome, careworn, little pallid face and her sad quiet eyes, looked at him so frankly, a hitherto unknown sensation of wonder came to him: a sudden elucidation—as if a minute ago he had understood

nothing of life and had now unexpectedly attained a complete and exact knowledge of it. He grasped the many-sidedness of all the trivial, yet awe-inspiring, happenings and realized that he had come rushing in like a wild man of the woods, in order to safeguard Jozette from a trifling inconvenience, not for one moment remembering that this inconvenience was as nothing compared to the grief which it must cause to some one else. All his anger had evaporated; he looked at the little woman as if he were craving her help, but her questioning eyes, in which there was an expression of growing anxiety and astonishment, made him more and more confused. He gazed down; on the table was a medicine bottle. Without knowing what he was doing, he tried to read the label.

It was as if these moments of silence were never going to end. "I think you are one of these painters whom we used to see working in the garden every day?" Madame Lourty said at last.

Célestin nodded. And then, not calculating the effect of his words, he began to talk:

"It is very difficult. . . . I should hate to hurt you . . . it would really grieve me . . . but we may be able to help each other . . . of course I would never have breathed a word to you had I not known that Monsieur Lourty is ill and not quite responsible for his actions. . . ."

In addition to a painful shock Madame Lourty felt an unbearable indignation surging up in her.

"You are here on behalf of . . . ?" she asked, hurt and indicating with her head and eyes the door above them. A blush of shame coloured her cheeks very slightly, while at the same time a suspicion of scorn shadowed her drooping mouth.

"And this hardened Célestin's heart.

"Yes," he said, "I have come for . . ." then he also hesitated and stopped short; he did not want to say

"Jozette": neither did she want to say "Mademoiselle Leroi" . . . in fact he had no desire to emphasize her relations to Aristide . . . "I have come for my friends upstairs," he said at last—never yet had he found an interview so difficult.

Madame Lourty's pale face had become even sadder and he thought he detected in her eyes a kindlier expression.

Once again he tried to explain without any further thought, throwing himself into the sorrow which he knew to be there. He would be quite frank . . . he had come to complain . . . but he was still so inexperienced and impetuous that he had not thought it all out beforehand . . . it was now perfectly clear to him that it was not so very bad for them . . . on the other hand—perhaps it was as well that he had come . . . there must be no misunderstanding between them. He hoped Madame Lourty would be convinced of his good intentions. Possibly she could give him some advice . . . as to how to help his friend . . . and the girl . . . out of this little difficulty. . . .

"Oh!" said Madame Lourty, getting very red, "your friend need not have a moment's anxiety . . . if the girl herself does not give any encouragement."

"No, no," Célestin said ardently, "she does not do that . . . she is discretion itself."

The little woman bowed her head in frigid acquiescence, at the same time conveying quite politely that she doubted the veracity of what she was told. Then the expression on her face became strangely inscrutable.

"I can understand your friend's anxiety," she said; "it is inevitable, when one enters into relationships such as his." She looked at him from under her eyelashes.

Now it was Célestin's turn to blush. He got up brusquely and fidgeted nervously with his cap.

"I have conveyed our grievances to you," he said as a conclusion to his call.

For a moment his sudden departure took her by surprise; she searched for something to say but could find nothing. Célestin muttered a vague generality to the effect of "Better health for the invalid"; then looking pathetically regretful, he said good-bye and went.

The little woman, a trifle awkwardly, let him out; she would have liked to say something which would have given a less abrupt ending to the interview.

After Célestin had gone, a sense of great astonishment was combined with her feeling of bitterness and misery.

Whenever she had seen these two boys at work at the back of the garden she had always been amused and irritated with the affected noisy one, and his velvet artist's cap—and now he showed himself to be such a nice boy.

"A sensitive boy," she thought again, as she reflected on her last words . . . she could not remember exactly what they were, but she remembered the sharp intonation in her voice, as she said them . . . the memory of his sad face, as he left her, stabbed at her heart.

Perhaps it had done him good, to hear such things from a respectable woman . . . who knows. . . .

She wondered how this little incident could absorb her thoughts in face of the great unhappiness of her life, which by means of this visit had dealt her another tremendous blow . . . how dreadful it was to think that already she had learned to accept it all as being quite natural! . . . What could Alphonse have been up to this time? . . . In her confusion she had omitted to ask . . . could he have gone up to the top flat again? . . . or had he stopped the creature on the stairs? . . . or on the street? . . . Why all this, in addition to everything else? It would be so bad for him! Where could it all end? The doctor was so mysterious about it . . . things were not going well with him just now . . . he would probably never be cured.

Madame Lourty felt a shiver down her spine; then,

absent-mindedly, she drew her finger across the bars of the empty parrot-cage and gazed gloomily outside. Life was becoming such a burden—for days she had worried about a new difficulty in connexion with the question of their rent . . . which Madanie Carpentier had told her would probably be raised 200 francs. . . . “The whole of the left wing of the house,” she added with suspicious haste. Madame Lourty felt immediately that this was a lie. She told Jeanne, who made inquiries at Dr. Valency’s. Valency laughed—Madame Carpentier, he said, had requested him to give such an answer as this, if he were asked . . . but he refused to do this . . . there was not a word of truth about this so-called increase in rent for every one . . . it was nothing but a ruse to get the Lourtys out of the house.

Jeanne had come upstairs in a rage, but before she had time to speak Madame Lourty stopped her: “I knew it, Jeanne, don’t tell me anything about it. We are the only ones . . . but what are we to do . . . will they really raise our rent? . . . or is it just an empty threat?” She lacked the moral courage to tell the Carpentiers to their faces that they were liars . . . insulting glances and insulting words would be her reward. . . . The landlord? . . . but he knew all about it, of course, had helped to evolve the plan. . . . Oh! all this pettiness and humiliation which she had to endure in this wretched life of persecution. . . .

And if they raised her rent . . . she would not dare to tell Alphonse . . . and yet it would be necessary . . . they would have to move . . . but then again there was no money for that. . . .

Again the little woman felt her eyes filling with tears . . . her fingers stopped stroking the bars of the cage. . . .

“And you have gone too,” she said aloud, as if she were talking to the bird who was no longer there. Lourty, in his increasing nervousness, had all at once not been able to stand the parrot’s talking any longer; so one morning Jeanne

took him home with her, under her wide coat; Etienne had whined for the cage, to be able to keep canaries in it later on.

II

After their return from Roubaix, Célestin set to work with frantic zeal; it was not in his old impetuous spasmodic way, but a determined effort of his unruly mind to get on . . . to get on. . . . There was in this frantic burst of work the wish to forget, and also the vague fervent hope which he did not own to himself that the future might bring about a change in his circumstances.

Often he worked on till late into the night, and sometimes they would not see him at the Rue Barral for a week. In order to save time he boarded in a little dairy in the Rue Campagne-Première itself; he breakfasted there at a table behind the counter and ate his evening meal in a dark recess upstairs, with two workmen and a poor student; at twelve o'clock he snatched a *plat* somewhere in the neighbourhood of his school.

Aristide had resumed the calm life of the time before they started sketching in the garden; he went to such lectures as were compulsory and lost all taste for the ones which necessitated work at home. Their room was too small and their table was too small, he told himself. As a matter of fact he was afraid that his "homework" would appear childish to Jozette.

He "painted." Once or twice during the course of the week . . . he took a morning or an afternoon off and, sitting with his easel by the open window, far above the golden autumn garden, he did little fantastic panels, superficially after the style of Moreau, for whom he had suddenly conceived a passion. But for the rest he went out fairly regularly every morning after eight o'clock to his draw-

ing class; returned at eleven o'clock and left again at one.

Since he had got back to Paris, Aristide had enlarged his views on the subject of friendship; after all they had behaved like regular greenhorns, always together, Monsieur Baroche and Monsieur Boulard, Monsieur Boulard and Monsieur Baroche, a couple of country cousins. . . . Célestin had evidently felt that too, at any rate he kept much more to himself latterly—at their joint classes, Aristide often only waved to him from a distance; all his pleasant manner was now reserved for two Parisian boys: the son of a famous artist, who was as he said himself before “moving” for good, to the Rue Bonaparte, taking a few lessons at the “Arts Décoratifs,” and the son of an industrial magnate. And frequently he spent his evenings away from home; three times a week he left Jozette because he had an engagement, an evening lecture, or he must go to a meeting or to the German Artists’ Club, to which the professor downstairs had introduced him. He thought himself that he was making tremendous progress in general development; this was life, you heard all sorts of things, you came to have all sorts of new views, your opinions became more settled. . . .

Jozette noticed that his choice of words was beginning to change and that he liked to explain theories which vaguely she remembered having heard before. He also read a great deal of poetry; sometimes he read aloud to himself in exalted tones and Jozette would say that she thought it beautiful, although it usually drifted past her like an opaque cloud of words . . . one of these poets, Beaudelaire, she considered horrid and she almost stopped loving Aristide when he talked of him enthusiastically with a note of superiority in his voice.

When they were half-way through October Aristide was more than a hundred francs in debt. Célestin lent him half of it and Jozette supplied the rest out of her savings.

But a few days later he received unexpectedly an order to do four panels on a screen in the boudoir of a German baroness, the wife of a merchant. One evening at the German Artists' Club where she acted as a sort of patroness, Aristide had been introduced to her by the professor.

He set to work with great enthusiasm, neglecting his lessons for the time being. When after a few days of feverish work the sketches were finished he went to the noble mansion to execute them; this was a fad of the rather too ostentatiously artistic woman, whose chief idea was to enable the artist to execute his work with the greatest possible exactitude, so that he need not put down one single dab of paint which did not harmonize completely with the rest of the colour scheme. For fourteen mornings and afternoons Aristide worked on sheets and old table-cloths in a corner of a drawing-room, in which on white Smyrna rugs nothing but dim white furniture was placed. And among much glittering crystal there was the subdued silky sheen of china blue and pink, like the colour of hydrangeas. Aristide was intoxicated with the delicious luxury of it all. He painted four vaguely fantastic landscapes, delicate sunsets over pale blue hills, in the shades of the room, and every one was delighted with them.

At the end of the fortnight he put 700 francs in his pocket, had lunched fourteen times at a table, the like of which he had never dreamed of, and had gained the friendship of sundry French and German important personages whom he had met in the house of his patroness. Twice over he was asked to an evening party, for which he bought a dinner-jacket, an opera hat, a pair of patent leather shoes and several pairs of gloves, which purchases swallowed up most of the 700 francs which he had earned.

With a little practice he soon mastered a becoming society manner; and he noted with pleasure that he was able to put a touch of reserved dignity into this pleasant manner. The

women in particular were charming to him; they went the length of little intimate conversations, with innuendoes about love, when he would become very shy and blush, for he was ashamed of Jozette in these surroundings. His old naïve and rather commonplace illusions about Parisian life were once more uppermost; to be the lover of a great actress, an actress of the Théâtre Français for instance, a smart and capricious young woman who would cherish a mad passion for him. He would gladly have given a few years of his life to be seen by his baronesses and countesses driving about with the said actress, elegant in her sable furs, adorned by the spring violets given to her by him, and above all, sitting beside her in a heavy fur coat, he himself loving and beloved and envied . . . of course, he told himself, this actress must be Jozette. . . .

At this juncture he would think with a deep pity of her little plain skirts and blouses and simple hats; he was aware of the fact that she had been a corset-maker and this suddenly appeared to him an inferior sort of calling, a ridiculous profession even, and not very respectable.

At home he was in the habit of telling enthusiastic tales about his adventures in the great world, about all the exquisite refinements, especially at meals: at dessert, one received a separate plate with a damask cover on it and a small crystal bowl half-filled with water and in it a slice of lemon. The delicious *hors d'œuvres* were given *before* the soup in these circles, not after it; the fish served in little boneless morsels rolled up like pats of butter; the hostess did not carve the chicken but cut it with a large pair of silver scissors, and for the fruit one used a special kind of plated knife, which left the taste pure and unimpaired. These tales were often a sort of mental exercise, meant to fix quite clearly in his head any touches of luxury and good form which might have escaped him at the time. . . . When towards the middle of November financial difficulties threat-

ened him again, Aristide gave up his plan of buying for Jozette a costume made of gold-coloured cloth in which she could accompany him to the theatre. Jozette filled a gap of 50 francs, but this time there was no question of Aristide paying it back.

He had become more difficult to please in their everyday life; the thing which upset him most after the fourteen lunches, was eating from plain spoons and forks; so he wrote to Roubaix for a *couvert* and as it would have aroused suspicion if he had dared to ask for more than one, he now used silver things and Jozette tin ones. But worse still was to come when the cold weather made a fire essential; they had bought at a cheap shop in the Rue de la Gaieté, a very small stove, the smallest they could find, which nevertheless took up a good-sized piece of the already limited floor space; and a yet uglier and larger encumbrance was the fuel chest beside it.

Aristide could not understand now how he could ever have thought this hole of a room attractive and beautiful; life was not worth living in it; you couldn't move; it was always too hot or too cold. If, half-suffocated by the lamp and that red-glowing object, you opened the window in the evening, then you caught your death of cold in the draught, and if Jozette, for reasons of economy, attempted to cook anything on that stove instead of on the gas-ring behind the curtain, he would get angry and with an almost hostile expression in his melancholy violet eyes grumble about the labourer's cottage into which he had drifted.

Sometimes he would sit down beside the table, and with a look of hopeless despair on his pale face gaze into space, make some sudden remark with a scornful laugh and in a high-pitched broken voice and then set to work again, languidly resigned.

All this made Jozette unhappy. Very occasionally she

lost control of her temper and flew out at him, and once or twice she gave way to one of her old fits of sulky indignation when no one could do anything with her; but as a general rule she endured it all; Aristide was so fastidious, so over-sensitive—she felt sure that things were more difficult for him than for any one else.

But there were days when everything was as it used to be, lovely still November days with a keen nip in the air, when they would walk for hours without getting tired and when life still seemed full of simple joys.

Then they would wander all afternoon in the Bois de Boulogne, or in the Jardin des Plantes. Jozette, to please Aristide, had bought a winter costume out of her own money, a small russet-brown fur cap and a little reddish-brown fur coat. Aristide thought she was rather like a dainty little Russian princess and was quite proud of her. On one of these expeditions Jozette suddenly saw an acquaintance of the horrible year before she met Thierry making straight for them across the busy street—she was her best acquaintance at that time, almost a friend; yet, with the natural instinct for self-preservation, Jozette was overcome by a cowardly impulse to hasten away from the street corner and drew Aristide's attention to a shop window. But the other one, walking with great determination and rather ostentatiously, had already made her way through the traffic and was beside them.

"You do not recognize me?" she asked good-naturedly.

She wore a slightly soiled pale grey-and-orange coat and skirt and hat, rather old-fashioned and too summery for the time of year, which gave her a poverty-stricken appearance.

When Jozette saw these little brown eyes, so generous in their insolence, and that wide laughing mouth opposite her, she could but be friendly, although with an unconsciously terrified movement her arm drew Aristide's convulsively to-

wards her. "Armande!" she said warmly in a tremulous voice; the other, a good girl and not stupid, immediately said, including Aristide: .

"We were friends in the workshop, but oh! that's a long time ago." Then turning to Jozette with light-hearted outspokenness:

"So you are no longer with that Thierry?"

Jozette shook her head violently.

The grey-and-orange girl winked sympathetically, conveying a promise of silence. She addressed Aristide, who answered her quite politely and looked curious. In her unexpected whimsical manner she suddenly touched Jozette's arm.

"I must speak to you," she said. . . . "Your monsieur will buy himself a cigar over there."

"You have fallen on your feet, then, petite?" the fair girl asked in a voice which showed how pleased she was. "An *affaire* of the heart?"

"Yes," said Jozette, with a very subdued note in her voice, which the other girl took for a kindly desire not to rejoice in the presence of a less fortunate sister.

"I . . . oh yes!" she said airily, "always the same. But I am very glad that I have met you again. So many evenings spent together are not easily forgotten. . . ."

Jozette felt curiously at ease in this company and with this sort of talk. . . . She experienced a wild rush of inexplicable sensations; a momentary vague longing for that miserable freedom, of dizzy repugnance, a violent reaching-out towards Aristide's love. Then she suddenly felt a soothing of her terrors; when two women had experienced such things together they could never be entire strangers to each other again.

"You were often so good to me, . . ." she said gently—remembering how more than once the older and more worldly-wise one had come to her rescue, how she had sent

the quieter of two fellows to her, keeping the more brutal one herself—and on one occasion, when she knew that Jozette had not dined yet, she had bullied her cavalier into taking Jozette with them to the restaurant . . . and how during the most difficult period she had helped her with money. . . .

"Bah," said the fair-haired girl, "that's all in the day's work"; then all at once: "I shall speak to you, if I ever meet you alone, otherwise I shall pretend not to see you. . . . My tongue might run away with me and I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Good-bye, you must go now," she said abruptly, just pressing her cheek against Jozette's shoulder; and turning away. "Still at 9 Rue Landernau!"

After taking a few steps she hurried back.

"Can you by any chance lend me five francs?"

Jozette made a desperate sign to show that she had not any money with her.

"All right! all right! don't think any more about it," said the fair girl and went.

"What did that baggage want?" Aristide inquired when, as he puffed at his cigarette in the tobacconist's door, Jozette came towards him.

"She was in difficulties; she asked me to lend her five francs, but I had not got it," said Jozette.

With careless generosity Aristide took a Napoleon out of the purse which he still held in his hand and gave it to Jozette. "Hurry," he said.

But when they looked round the grey-and-orange girl had already vanished.

A little later, during their walk, Aristide reverted to this meeting and Jozette realized, with a shock, that his imagination was aroused by the fact of her having acquaintances of this sort—then she forced herself to think how sweet and kind of him it was to give those five francs like that with-

out hesitation, and in the midst of her nervous confusion she felt a wave of glowing tenderness towards him.

After sending in the famous screen to the Avenue d'Eyla, Aristide once more betook himself regularly, at any rate in the mornings, to his "Arts Décoratifs"; but very shortly the everlasting going to school began to bore him again. He came to the conclusion that he must do something else as well.

Then the idea came to him to paint in his spare time a portrait of Madame Leguënné. This was during the last few days of November. He had met her on the stairs in one of her more odd assortment of clothes: a faded dark reddish purple, with a touch of soft moss-green at the neck, above which was her mysterious face. He was greatly struck by this . . . he wanted her to pose in the twilight of her mysterious basement-rooms, when the fluid medley of colours would be still more strange; in his imagination he saw the portrait of a woman, like the one by Aman-Jean in the Luxembourg.

Madame Leguënné was delighted with his proposal; with a grateful melancholy joy she gazed at him; did he mean it? a poor sick woman as she was? and she ogled him with languishing eyes, conjuring up her most pitiful smile. . . . Then as he mentioned terms, she looked alarmed; money? of course not, she would most gladly oblige him . . . but perhaps he might compensate her for what she did not earn with her sewing during these hours. . . .

They were foggy dreary days which followed; and from nine in the morning till twelve o'clock, and in the afternoons from one to four, Madame Leguënné and Monsieur Baroche sat facing each other in silence in the cavernous kitchen. . . .

Madame Leguënné was the ideal model; for hours at a time, with exactly the same unutterable soul-sadness in her pining far-away eyes, she remained motionless, her two

hands held in languishing meditation to her bowed face, just as Aristide had taught her.

During each interval she looked up at Aristide with girlish timidity and always inquired in coy suspense how he was getting on; often also she tried to find out what he meant to do with this portrait . . . with her secret burning vanity there was no end to her questions. Aristide was convinced that he was painting a masterpiece, and when during the intervals he got tired of the sentimental woman's conversation he sought out Jozette; without her, he could not work!

Since then Jozette sat patiently through the apparently never-ending hours on Madame Leguënné's low garden chair by the window, and whenever the brushes were at rest for a moment her cheerful little voice would chatter lightly, in the manner which she knew he needed while he was resting, and read aloud bits of news out of the paper, or extracts from a book which she was busy reading.

When he was beginning to make progress, she noticed that Aristide's technique and style were quite different from those of his first large paintings, for which she had posed . . . she put it down to the difference in the subjects . . . herself and Madame Leguënné! But when one day she mentioned it to Aristide, he contradicted her energetically; oh no! . . . no comparison . . . he was so much farther on and more mature than he was six months ago . . . he had an entirely different conception of colour now . . . the painting upstairs was just a daub, without a single merit . . . old-fashioned.

Jozette thought of the hours when, in their unfinished little room, she, quivering with joy over her own beauty, gave this beauty to Aristide . . . she had posed before, but never like this. It had seemed to her as if a tingling of her body became a current, flowing to Aristide to inspire him and bind him to her for all time.

But the thing was good for nothing, he said. After Aristide had worked for about ten days, Madame Leguënne suddenly became very ill; also another pay day for her ever-increasing debt loomed nearer.

Every morning at about eight o'clock she could be seen going to the consulting-room of a doctor in the *quartier*.

On the fourth morning she returned with a certificate admitting her into the Hôpital Cochin.

And in the afternoon, in her grey flannel morning-dress, a black shawl round her head and a bundle of clothes under her arm, she stepped into a *fiacre* and allowed herself to be driven to the Rue Méchain, which was five minutes away. That day Aristide was utterly despondent; that pallor, those eyes, that expression of grief! he had a presentiment that the woman would either die or be cured, and in either case his masterpiece would be lost to the world.

III

One evening, a few days before Christmas, Aristide, in a well-known artists' café in the Quartier Latin, suddenly came upon Thierry. The blood rushed to his temples . . . this was one of the coincidences which he had always feared! Aristide saw the soft brown eyes fixed upon him. And suddenly stopping in the middle of his conversation with the easy gestures of the generally accepted great man, he apologized lightly and came straight to Aristide.

"Monsieur Baroche!" . . .

Aristide did not know in the least what to do with himself. He muttered something, bowing awkwardly. Thierry, with gracious affability, said a few words of introduction, and before he was aware of anything happening, Aristide was sitting with him at a table, and Thierry had ordered a "boc" for each of them.

"Fortunate youth," he remarked amiably; "the middle-

aged man gives the little lady a life like a princess . . . then the young prince comes, and—she runs away.”

Aristide laughed, much flattered. In the twinkling of an eye he felt thoroughly at home, everything was so natural. . . . “And Jozette, how is she?” Thierry inquired most suavely.

“Very well . . . very well. . . .” said Aristide.

The other man looked at him; this boy with his finely chiselled joyous face and his mixture of knowingness and self-esteem attracted him greatly. Perhaps, also, he felt instinctively a similarity in their views on life.

“A good girl . . . a thoroughly good girl,” he remarked in a somewhat bored voice; “you might have done worse, Monsieur Baroche.” And when Aristide looked a little astonished, in face of such callousness, Thierry said:

“Confess, Monsieur Baroche, that you thought we were now sworn foes, as it happens in the penny novelettes . . . an artist must not take love too seriously, learn this from me . . . and let an old Parisian teach you this as well—love is a matter either of courteous and graceful light-heartedness . . . or of practical deliberation, anything else is of the devil, suggestion and tradition and barbarism . . . Jozette preferred you, and why should she not? It was not pleasant for me . . . I had neglected her a bit . . . it was stupid . . . but because this has happened surely there is no reason for sulking to you? . . .”

At the other end of the room there was a short applause for a *cabotin*, who was imitating Mounet Sully, Sarah Bernhardt and Polaire. . . . Thierry turned towards it, laughed and clapped his hands for a moment, pleasantly but without any particular interest. Seen in profile, there was a transparent blue puffiness under his mild light brown eyes, his wan cheeks were slightly pallid and furrowed with little lines, his features were not marked, but between the carefully tended moustache and silky curling beard was a thin-

lipped, very red, determined mouth, a mouth showing an iron will and a stubborn spirit.

"You might perhaps have come a few years later . . . that is the only thing for which I bear you any grudge," he said, half in earnest and half in jest. . . . "I should have liked to take her with me on my travels to Morocco . . . we were so used to one another. . . ."

Aristide had never looked at life from this angle. . . . Whenever he thought and felt consciously, he tried always to move in an atmosphere of forced and glorified sentiment. . . . He stared at Thierry, quite dumbfounded; it had never occurred to him that one could talk in this way; he considered it cynical, but he thought at the same time: "This is a man who has become a great artist," and he suddenly knew himself to be just a boy and very inexperienced. . . .

"And if I had come three years later?" Aristide inquired. "Three years later is a long time . . . perhaps with my first white hairs I might have suffered from an old man's passion and would have wanted to fight a duel with you . . . or possibly by that time, I might have been thinking of getting married! . . . Seriously, Monsieur Baroche, you must work, work; take a girl like Jozette, that is the cheapest way, and do not change too often; nothing is greater waste of time than affairs of the heart—*that* for the first stage, from twenty to forty, and for the second stage, when you have arrived, then marry. . . . That's my programme . . . make the most of it!"

Thierry got up and shook Aristide's hand.

"We shall meet again," he said. And reverting to the subject: "Jozette is an excellent girl . . . simple and un-exacting and well-trained. If it were not for you, I should still take her with me to Morocco. . . ." He said this as a joke.

With the rather weary smile of a man who consistently

overtaxes his strength, he nodded to Aristide, and with a negligent wave of the hand towards the tables which he passed, he departed.

After he had gone, Aristide joined the little group of acquaintances, with whom he had come. Their talk was of Thierry. Oh, Thierry, he is a sly fox . . . three of his paintings have been hung at the "Artistes Français." . . . It was said that he had received an order for a portrait of the Comtesse de Castellane . . . a "clou" for next spring's *salon*. . . . Some people minimized his talent . . . an immense amount of technique, but nothing individual . . . showy work without any depth. "Of course, of course," Aristide thought, "if only you had got so far yourselves! Nothing but envy, all that swaggering talk!" He had conceived a great admiration for this Thierry. . . . An artist, who is wrapped up in his art, does not allow himself to be ruled by his futile feelings. . . . Oh, he would like to be Thierry; he would try and worry less about things, to take love more lightly.

Slowly, Aristide walked home, in the late evening. His feelings towards Jozette fluctuated in a curious fashion. . . . He admitted to himself that he ought, by rights, to value her more than he had ever done; but the thought that all the fierce jealousy which he had felt a few months back had proved so entirely unnecessary and ridiculous, gave him a sense of disillusionment too. Absurd, to think that Jozette's going or not going to the Luxembourg had been an obsession for weeks and weeks!—the absurdity of it did not make him appear a fool in his own eyes; it only took away some precious, dear and intimate thing from his ideal of Jozette.

And yet Thierry would be glad to have her back. . . . This kindled his ardour again. . . . No, Jozette belonged to him; he thought of all her sweet and beautiful being . . . she still appealed to his senses.

"An excellent girl, unexacting, well-trained," Thierry's

voice said then, and it was as if a chill wind held him in its teeth. He rang the bell. After the front-door cord from out of the loge-bed had caused the door to swing open with a gentle thud, as if a miracle were concealed behind it, he suddenly heard from the recesses of the dark hall the wailing uncanny crowing of a cock, which sent a shiver creeping up his spine.

And again it came, muffled, yet more shrilly, screeching upwards from the cavernous depths of the basement.

Hastily Aristide lit a match, in order to find the staircase; when, after the first few steps, the flickering flame died away, he climbed up another ten steps, pursued by the ever more distant threatening screech, duller and at longer intervals, fading into an echo. . . .

CHAPTER 13

I

FROM seven o'clock onwards, Julie's mouse-like activity pervaded Mademoiselle Lefournier's immaculate apartment. In her felt slippers, she shuffled across the shining parquet floors of the little entrance hall and the drawing-room, and she moved inaudibly over the thick rugs of the Japanese boudoir and the bedroom. Mademoiselle was still asleep; she had just stirred when Julie very gently pulled up the iron draughthood of the open fire-place.

Ugh, how cold and dark it was. Outside was a yellow-grey dim, foggy morning, and although the large anthracite stove in the drawing-room burned fiercely—owing to the open windows upon which Mademoiselle insisted at night time, the apartment still remained cold.

On her knees, Julie crouched beside the fire-place, and with great care she arranged the tiny blocks of fire-wood, going into the kitchen to get a spill, so as to avoid the scraping sound and the bad odour of sulphur-matches.

Across the still dusky room the little form flitted, while above her and over the walls and ceiling crept a shifting ruddy glow; an elongated flame glowed from the burning paper spill in her hand.

"Um—um," crooned a soft voice from out of the dim white bed.

"Have I wakened Mademoiselle?" Julie said, with a start.

"No, no . . . Julie . . ."

"Has Mademoiselle slept well?"

"Yes . . . beautifully!" This was followed by a placid little yawn, like a long drawn-out note of music.

The fire now began to roar and crackle gently, the chink of light became fiercer and more pronounced.

Mademoiselle Lefournier sat up, against her pillows; she yawned again softly, and rubbed her eyes with her white slender hand. From the kitchen came the friendly tinkle of a stirring spoon.

A moment afterwards Julie appeared, carrying cautiously in one hand a gently jingling saucer and cup over which floated a little cloud of steam, pulled up the draught-hood, and from the copper-rimmed picture, which stood out in its frame of square white tiles, the room was wrapped in a peaceful red glow.

Warm dancing lights flickered on the ceiling; there were rosy folds in the white linen flounce along the canopy of the bed, and in this half-darkness the woman sat among the pillows, her face just tinged with pink, and a shining light in her quiet eyes.

A scent which might have come from a field of flowers was wafted through the air, as Julie took the bluish-white china cup, now a transparent golden-red, from the table, and brought it to the bedside; it was the tea made of wild violets and sweetened with pure honey, which Mademoiselle was ordered to drink an hour before breakfast.

She took the shell-like saucer between her slim fingers, and in the other outstretched hand she clasped the wide fragile bowl. . . . Julie lingered for a few seconds.

Thoughtfully the woman, her face dimly lit up by the faint glow, gazed at the capricious reflection of the firelight on the dim white lace coverlet.

"I dreamed last night," she said vaguely, "that we were in the country. . . . It was summer, early in the morning . . . cool and sweet . . . and somewhere in the distance a cock crowed. . . ."

"I have not heard that for some time," she said with a great longing in her staring eyes, and smiled.

"This summer, we shall leave Paris again, Julie. . . ."

Her pointed delicate hand stirred the golden-yellow honey in the tiny amber pond to the surface; the silver spoon tinkled against the ringing china.

Shivering, dipping his towel gingerly in the icy water, Herz, in his grey baize shirt, performed his ablutions at the little mahogany hand wash-stand. He shivered; he had slept badly that night, and he felt even more frozen than usual. It was bitterly cold; behind the thin gauze curtains which rustled in the slightest draught, the window-panes were dimly frosted, with dripping icicles along the framework.

From the shop, through the dividing door, which she had opened to allow a little of the huge stove's heat to penetrate, came the sound of Germaine's halting footsteps.

In her fawn and sky-blue striped petticoat and her white dressing-jacket, which showed a strong curve where no corset as yet kept the too-high hip in check, she moved about in front of the long mirror, and did her hair. When she came into the bedroom again to put away her brush and comb, she found Herz grumbling pitifully:

"Oh, these winters in Paris! . . . surely our bedroom is particularly cold, with its northern aspect. . . ."

"It's not Paris and not the winter, and not this room," Madame Dutoit said huffily. . . . "It's the cock you heard in the night. . . . You could not sleep for that cock crowing!"

Herz agreed, good-naturedly. Yes, he had slept badly; that cock had wakened him three times, and the third time he could not get to sleep again. . . .

"That's all right then," said Madame Dutoit. She slipped on a dressing-gown and hurried to the dining-room, where

she put the window ajar, in order to peep outside. It was just as she thought: in the patched-up chicken-run, on Madame Leguënné's neglected piece of ground, among the four fluttering hens, which were still unused to the situation, paraded, in a glory of tawny-brown and greenish-black, with an enormous blood-red comb on his head, and a tail which flapped in the icy blast, the new cock. . . .

Madame Dutoit shut the window hastily.

"Well . . . what is it? . . ." Herz cried from the bedroom. In his buff-coloured vest, with, on the top of it, a foolish-looking little white dickey, his wet hair combed out straight, and the comb, which was about to make the parting, in his hand, he approached, full of curiosity.

Madame Dutoit, pressed against the corner window, was still gazing outside.

"What is it? There is a cock walking about outside which will not be there any more to-morrow," she announced. Then she hurried back to the bedroom, to go on with her dressing.

By the uncertain light of the flickering hissing gas-jet, which fell through the kitchen door, Jeanne worked in the still pitch-dark entrance-hall of Doctor Valency's apartment. She was particularly busy; already she had dusted all the glass panels of the Moorish lantern. . . . Now, standing on a chair, she puffed and polished at the blades and hilts of the weapons and trophies—before Christmas, she wanted to give a general cleaning-up to all her places. And the doctor's flat in particular must be very tidy, as he was expecting friends for the *réveillon*.

His bare calves showing out of his white *burnous*, just like summer, Valency walked through the mouldy smelling apartment, with its hothouse atmosphere; after he had already gone into the study, he tugged roughly at the draped curtain and asked: "Who has a cock in this house?"

"Madame Leguënne has bought one," said Jeanne.

Valency seemed a trifle disappointed in this answer. The tapestry-curtains fell back with a sigh.

When, half an hour later, he had breakfast, and brushed his trousers in the little hall, he dived into his long black ulster with its wide, crossed, Astrakhan collar, put on his round Astrakhan cap, which sank as far down as his eyebrows, and looked exactly like a lively little Pole or Turk.

"So Madame Dutoit has not got a cock?" he inquired again of Jeanne, who shook her head. . . . It was Gabrielle who possessed a cock since yesterday. . . ."

"Indeed," said Valency. He was sorry. He would not have grudged that sick creature her amusement; on the other hand, he could not appear at the laboratory half asleep. He had been crowed awake in the middle of the night, and with his nervous Eastern disposition he might as well step straight out of bed, if anything disturbed his slumbers. The only thing which had shortened his long wakeful night was the pleasant supposition that the diabolical animal belonged to the lady of the priests' hats, and that he might be able to enveigle this "free woman" into a skirmish.

His mind not yet made up, he went through the hall. . . . After all, he decided not to put in a complaint at the loge . . . although, he thought again, it seemed too absurd to sacrifice his night's rest for that idiot of a woman downstairs. . . . He had only just got past the glass door, when behind it the sound of violent talking with much arm waving attracted his attention, and he saw Madame Dutoit standing there. He heard the impudent, frightened and apologetic voice of the concierge's wife: "We had thought . . . in the winter . . . when nearly every one sleeps with their windows closed . . ."

Valency unbuttoned his coat and went in.

"A cock remains a cock," said Madame Dutoit, "and he crows the same in winter as he does in summer."

The concierge's wife, talking over Madame Dutoit's head, now turned to Valency with marked affability.

"What can I do for you, m'sieur le docteur?"

"I was just coming to speak to you about Madame's cock," he said with an imperturbable face, raising his eyelids towards Madame Dutoit.

"You see," she said triumphantly, "what did I say? I am not alone, as you see," and still more triumphantly to Valency:

"I must explain to you, that it is not my cock!"

"I am sorry," he said.

"Why are you sorry?" Madame Dutoit inquired eagerly.

"Because I now fear that you have not slept either," the little doctor said solemnly.

Madame Carpentier began to enjoy the incident.

"So Madame and Monsieur have been even more bothered with the cock than Peter was. . . ." she said at random.

Madame Dutoit rose at once. . . . "It did not wake Peter, and yet Peter was more bothered with the cock than we were, and perhaps that truth-loving cock was more bothered with Peter than Peter with him."

"Rather a jolly soul, after all," thought Valency, and as Madame Carpentier uttered at last, "What do you mean?" he said:

"For shame, Madame Dutoit! Do you dare to scoff about Peter?"

"Of course," she answered. "Peter deserved his cock, but that cock down there need not scoff about us."

Valency felt vaguely that her remarks did not quite tally; nevertheless, this good woman said it all with such conviction that he could not think of an apt criticism on the spot.

"Well," he added, laughing, "I may as well go; I see I can leave the rest safely to you. . . ."

As he pulled the front door behind him, he heard the clear woman's voice, once more crowing her victory.

"Madame Coquerico," he nicknamed her to himself.

When, later in the morning, on her way home from the market, Madame Gros, in her timid yet sharp way also came to lodge her complaint, the Carpentiers were quite resolved: the cock must go, then and there, before the night. Carpentier himself went downstairs to issue the command. Their advice had never been asked, and the animal had been bought without their consent . . . he laid particular stress on this fact.

Gabrielle, cruelly roused from her sentimental raptures of the last twenty-four hours, tried with her most pitiable imploring attitude to avert disaster: "A sick woman's only pleasure, Monsieur Carpentier!" but Carpentier shrugged his shoulders, unrelenting, as if to indicate that he must yield to circumstances stronger than himself.

Broken and tragic she climbed after him, up the steps to the loge. . . . Hortense was very sorry for her: the poor soul was so delighted, when, on the previous afternoon, the milk boy had arrived with the cock; never yet had she seen her so elated, in such ecstasies of joy. . . .

"Listen, Gabrielle," she said kindly . . . "Madame Dutoit, Madame Gros, Monsieur Valency . . . n'est-ce pas? . . ."

Without a word, her face drawn with grief, she departed; she went downstairs, came up again, went out at the front door, to the dairy-woman; she came back again, went once more . . . she filled the hall with her inconsolable misery.

The dairy-woman could not cancel the sale . . . if only she had come a few hours earlier . . . there had been an offer . . . but now . . . if necessary she would not object to killing the bird, for Madame's own use.

Madame Leguënné stood, with both arms hanging limply by the side of her body.

"Kill him? . . ." she inquired, in artless consternation,

but in the depths of her fawn-like eyes smouldered the flame of secret greed. The word *réveillon* had jumped to her mind. . . .

When Madame Carpentier met her a little later in the courtyard she tried to say a few words of comfort. Gabrielle, vaguely reproachful, pointed to the copper and greenish-black cock, so new and glittering among her shabby hens.

"Oh, what a pity . . . what a pity . . ." she wailed, while round her languishing pallid mouth hovered an ambiguous smile; and right through the afternoon she sat with Hortense in the loge, a living indictment against the cruelty of the house, her strange eyes, full of pity-inspiring melancholy, but with every now and then, like a passing gleam, that smile, a mixture of sensuality and self-pity.

In the evening the dairy-woman came and killed the cock in the little hall of the basement, while Madame Leguënne stood by, with a lighted candle.

Just as she was piercing the darning-needle through the small brain-cavity, he disengaged one wing and flapped it twice over in a mad convulsion which caused the women to laugh inordinately.

Then Madame Leguënne placed the candle on the floor, and while the low flickering lights and the large trembling shadows played about their hands, they squatted down and each began to pluck one side of the bird.

After that they tied his feet together and hung him up—Hortense had consented to this—inside the door of the washhouse; when Madame Leguënne closed the door a little too hastily, she heard on the other side the head on its limp neck rattling against the wood with little sharp thuds.

She decided to ask Jeanne and Bonneau to supper . . . then Jeanne could roast the cock. . . .

II

On the evening of December 24th an odour of festivity permeated the entire house.

It began in the loge, where Ninouche, in his thick winter coat, lay replete and broad, in front of the steaming range, covered with pans of shimmering and broiling delicacies: it hung about the hall, at Madame Guillard's door, in the smell of a game-pie, newly taken from the oven; at the German's door, through which drifted the resinous fragrance of a large sparkling Christmas tree; it climbed up the stairs in the guise of the sweetness of fruit and flowers, which had been carried up them; it came out of the kitchens and dining-rooms on each floor, where thyme and laurel and marjoram were not spared that evening, and where custards browned and sauces steamed with madeira wine and maraschino.

The house was filled with the busy preparations for delicious meals; an ox-tongue and sweetbreads and a calf's breast had been delivered; a golden-necked, copper-tailed pheasant arrived at Mademoiselle Lefournier's; at the Bertin's a goose, and three times in succession Madame Gros came home, carrying a bulging marketing bag, through the wide meshes and the paper of which peeped the claws of a lobster, the labels on expensive tins of vegetables, pomegranates and tangerines.

In the low basement dining-room, Jeanne and Gabrielle stood in front of the range; the dancing fan-like flame of the gas on the wall throwing a bright tremulous light on their expectant faces. With their heads close together, they watched the huge fat cock turning a golden-yellow in the bubbling gravy . . . a luminous steam fluttered over the pan, and they sniffed the savoury odour.

At a small table in the bedroom, by the light of two candles, Leguënne and Robert sat and played at cards: the

men had been told to keep out of the way until dinner was ready.

Jeanne was red in the face and glowed with pleasure. She had done her best, and called upon all her faculties as a most proficient cook to prepare this repast really well. With the utmost care she browned the cock over the methyated spirit's flame. With finely minced meat and olives and mixed spices she stuffed the bird, and after that, according to the rules of the game, she tied the long neck between its legs and the wings on its back; furthermore, she put one small onion into the sauce and a *bouquet-garni*.

"Oh, he will be so tender!" she said.

She turned the roast with the large forks, which she handled like a *chef*, pressed the lightest spots once more against the sizzling pan, raised it on its tail-bone, so that there also the skin might get a golden-brown.

"Oh, he will be so tender!"

Every now and then, when a game was finished, and it was Robert's turn to deal, Leguënné could be heard as he shuffled the cards, tapping his foot in time to the music of a barrel-organ, which spasmodically and from a great distance, was wafted across the traffic, from the little fair on the Place de l'Observatoire.

Madame Leguënné heated the plates, arranged the table, and kept an eye on the first courses and the soup.

"By Jove!" Robert shouted from the other room. "What an exquisite smell!"

On the corner of the bed, on a clean newspaper, from where Jeanne took them to decorate the table, there were a number of good things—for Bonneau, when his wife told him that they had been invited to share a fat cock, had not been backward. . . . You could not be stingy at Christmas time . . . and so a royal share of the feast was provided by them: half a dozen apples, as large as a fist, yellow like butter and red like a cherry, and three bottles of cider wine, to

which Jeanne had added a jar of home-made jam and a tin of sardines, for *hors d'œuvres*. Leguënné, who was always original, had bought a bottle of English mixed pickles, and four miniature bottles of "Benedictine" and "Triple Sec."

Finally, at half-past eight, when the men were beginning to shout that they were starving, and the candles had almost burned down, Jeanne, in her bright and cheerful way, came to the door and announced: "Dinner is served, messieurs."

Sacré nom! What a festive dinner this was: on the shiny white table-cloth the glittering spoons and forks and the four steaming plates of yellow soup; in the middle, under the lamp, the bowl of apples, all their rosy cheeks turned uppermost, and round about the dessert and the *hors d'œuvres*, the jam and the plate of biscuits, the sardines and the large dish of potato salad!

Sacré bon sort, how they would gorge! What a rich man's *réveillon*! On the range the *entre côtes* and the beans simmered gently, and the cock, done to a turn, was being kept hot in a gentle oven.

The women had now taken off their working aprons, and sat at the table in their best clothes: Jeanne, particularly fresh and smart-looking in her purple blouse with white pipings; Gabrielle, almost pretty under the rosy-yellow lamp-light in her brick-red dress; she was less thin than a few months ago; there was even a suspicion of colour in her high cheekbones. . . . Her pallid damp mouth and her large eyes glowed with a strange greed.

On account of her weak digestion she decided to eat very little before the cock came. After a mouthful of soup, she allowed the spoon to rest in her plate, and looked on with a vague smile. Every now and then she put her narrow long hand languidly up to her hair or neck, and came out with a few words, which were nothing in themselves, but suggested the most ridiculous things to the others.

"Ma chérie!" said Leguënne, the first glass of cider wine in his hand, "to your Hôpital Cochin!"

"Well . . ." she said with a demure languor, "without the hospital you would never have had this cock. . . ."

She had managed to evade her usurer, and owing to a few cheap weeks, had been able to save a little money.

There was a great deal of laughter about this hospital-cock.

"But what the devil," Leguënne said suddenly, "why, have we already gulped down our soup without tasting this English concoction?"

With the aid of scissors and a pen-knife they picked off the silvered cork, poured out the contents into a sugar-basin, and the two men, laughing until the spoons juggled against their plates, wept copious tears whenever a hotly seasoned bean or a morsel of cauliflower nipped their tongues.

That sugar-basin with mustard pickles became the jest of the evening. They gave some to Jeanne, who ran away from the table to rinse her mouth at the tap: they dropped bits of it into each other's wineglasses, and drained them all the same, coughing and spluttering on account of their prickling throats and noses. Gabrielle, with her ambiguous gaze, took it all in, disapproving, and yet secretly entering into the spirit of the thing; then, overcome with a sudden violent and rather sickly longing, she expressed a wish to taste too: she pointed her sharp fingers prudishly into the pot, but before she could bring the little biting carrot which she had selected to her mouth, Jeanne hit it out of her hand with a well-aimed tap.

"Leave her! Leave her!" yelled Leguënne. He would gladly have given away the cock to see the face she would pull.

"Ma biche," he said sweetly, squeezing his eyes shut and holding up the half-empty sugar-basin to his wife, until Jeanne very pleasantly (she knew how to deal with Legu-

enne) came between them and distracted their attention with a joke.

"Wine! wine!" shouted the two as they burned their tongues on a particularly hot morsel.

Jeanne just laughed and good-naturedly filled the glasses again: those two great babies . . . what fun they were having!

After the hot mouthfuls of mixed pickles the tough greasy sardines slid down like an ointment . . . they ate them tails and all. . . .

When the tin was empty Robert poured the rest of the oil over his potato salad . . . a most delectable potato salad . . . mixed with chevril and shallots . . . tasty and fresh.

On the nicely heated plates which Gabrielle took from the range the slices of crackly brown roast beef were now placed, the knives glided through them, so tender they were. . . . What a grand tuck-in! And the French beans . . . like butter and honey, so sweet and soft!

Everything was going as merry as a marriage bell, thought Jeanne. Her little blunt nose shone a bright red under her flashing eyes. Her head felt airy and light, and was full of festive thoughts: it was as if all she knew about other festivities in the house made her even happier.

Madame Dutoit and Monsieur Herz were going to the Opera, she related, with an exaggerated enjoyment, and then they were going to have supper on one of the large Boulevards, in the Taverne de Brabant . . . a week ago already, Monsieur Herz had engaged a table. . . . Mademoiselle Le-fourrier's only brother was over, the Colonel from Bordeaux: they were going to the midnight service at St. Sulpice, and in the meantime Julie was preparing supper . . . and Dr. Valency was expecting two friends . . . an entire Eastern meal was arriving from some place in the Rue d'Ecole . . . she had set the table in the drawing-room that morning.

But she did not mention Madame Lourty who, the day before, had received a wonderful basket from Orleans. . . . Jeanne had helped to unpack it . . . a box with snipe and a large pot of liver paste and cakes and liqueurs, chocolates and surprises for Etienne. . . . Madame Lourty also would have her *réveillon*, she thought more than once!

Not a bean was left in the dish, and not a drop of sauce—the three cider bottles lay empty on the floor. Leguënné disappeared into their deep cellar cupboard and rose up again with, under each arm, a pint of superfine red wine.

There was a short breathing-space, and during a silence, which was almost a rite, amidst the whispering preparations of the women, the climax of the evening was awaited.

At last, with a cheer, that much-talked-about cock was placed on the table!

In a sudden burst of childish glee they raised their newly filled glasses high, doing homage to the wonderful dish, and drank the toast with such well-meant gusto that their glasses were drained once more.

"Your health, mon capitaine!" Robert said jocularly.

"To our charming cook," toasted the gallant Leguënné.

Then they fell to. Very quietly Jeanne hid the sugar-basin with the pickles. Quite serious now, and much calmer, the men feasted sumptuously on the dripping tender meat, and picked and sucked the bones and smacked their greedy lips over it and mumbled and groaned and quite forgot about their mixed pickles.

Jeanne had given Gabrielle the nicest piece on her plate. After the succulent wing, with its crackly yet slippery soft skin, she accepted a large slice of drier meat, which Jeanne carved from the back, and then another little piece from the side. . . .

Jeanne did warn her that she would make herself ill if she ate so much just before bedtime, but Madame Leguënné,

her lower eyelids drawn up over her sunken black pupils, demanded more sauce and more wine. . . .

"Leave her . . ." said Leguënne again, and Jeanne could not tell whether he said it out of a desire to make fun of her, or out of kindness. When all the best morsels were finished at last, and nothing but the carcass remained on the dish, Leguënne got hold of the head with the huge toothed comb.

"The cock's comb is the best part of all," he announced, "the chosen delicacy of professional epicures . . ." but when it came to tasting it, every one refused. Amidst boisterous laughter and with hilarious faces, the two fellows flung the soft grey gill on to each other's plates. "Eat that; eat that! . . ." they screamed, until in the end it flopped on to the floor and Robert put it with the bones.

When at last everything was skinned and picked, Gabrielle collapsed quietly back into her chair, and sighed long and deep, as if she were greatly relieved.

"You would almost think that she is pleased to have finished it," said Robert, in astonishment.

Leguënne caught Jeanne round the waist: just this once . . . a little woman who was such a clever cook . . .

At dessert they sat peacefully and happily together enjoying a last glass of wine and a biscuit and jam—and the apples! "They were of such a sweetness," the fresh juice cooled your throat like wine! Even Madame Leguënne ate half a one. . . .

For one moment during a silence as they peeled their fruit they heard quite close now the barrel-organ music of the little Christmas-fair, on the Place de l'Observatoire; it sounded thin and isolated in the hushed night, without any more street noises, that one could picture the deserted appearance of the few miserable tents and shooting-booths and dimly lighted merry-go-round, looking chilly and dark, in comparison with the brilliant rounded façade of Bullier's.

Now and again, with the chip-chop of horses' hoofs, and jingling of bells, cabs hurried through the empty street. . . . One stopped at the house, and the front door banging caused the lamp light to go down and up.

And after the apples were finished the men got up: there, now, they would go and get a breath of air, so that the women might clear away the things, and make the coffee to drink with their liqueurs. . . . But Jeanne put her foot down quite firmly: "Look here, out together, home together!" she said. "What about another game of cards in the bedroom . . . or perhaps 'the messieurs' would like to go to church?"

"Oh, oui!" said Gabrielle weakly, with a sudden sentimentality smouldering in her eyes, "could we not do that? that would be lovely—the four of us to church!"

She was so much in earnest that the three others did not even laugh.

"And what about our liqueur then!" said Robert; "sacré nom!" He had seen four excellent bottles there. . . .

Leguënné grinned. Gabrielle, with her strange vacant eyes, looked at her husband in a way which no one understood. But Leguënné, with a "you-can-walk-over-me" air, pacified the two women: "No, no, I have no evil intentions . . . we'll be back in quarter of an hour . . . honour bright."

Jeanne let them go with an anxious face: it was one thing for men of that sort to go, but another thing to know when to expect them back. . . . While Gabrielle, who was too weary to help, remained sitting at the table, Jeanne put away the dishes and ground the coffee.

They did not talk much. Jeanne was thinking of Madame Lourty diagonally above her through all these layers of dwellings; she saw them sitting at the dinner-table—Monsieur, Etienne and Madame. . . . For the first time during all the years that she had come to this house, Jeanne noticed

the strangeness of being under the same roof, and yet so immeasurably far away from each other. . . . She felt very sad for a moment, as if the little feast and the cock and everything had been a great disappointment.

But before the coffee had stopped dripping through the filter into the tin can, she heard the two men, with a great deal of good-natured racket, coming down the steps. And Gabrielle, all at once waking up from her daydream, her vague eyes still full of far-away wandering thoughts, said, with a nod towards the door to Jeanne, who stood quite still with a startled look: "Shall I tell you something? . . . He is going to the Sénégal . . . next month. . . ."

CHAPTER 14

I

IT was later than usual when Carpentier left the house hurriedly to go to his workshop. On the table in the loge were several piles of bank-notes and coins, for it was January 15, the day of the *grand terme*, and some of the tenants—Dr. Valency, Monsieur Bertin and Madame Guillard—had already come to pay their quarterly rent.

"You are not going to the Rue de Bréa, Hortense?" inquired Carpentier, on the point of departing.

"No, no," she said, "of course, I shall remain in the loge."

Madame Carpentier had formed the habit of going a good deal to her daughter-in-law's, now that she had a little one of two months. Camille was not strong, and as she insisted on nursing the baby herself, the climbing of stairs and the sweeping of floors and halls was sometimes rather much for her, and Hortense, who liked nothing better than to put on the airs of a grand lady towards her own tenants, when she got to the vast unknown house in the Rue de Bréa, dressed in afternoon clothes, settled herself in the loge and loved indulging in her sturdy love of work, which five or six years of ease had not been able to quell in her strong body. With a very good grace she did for her daughter-in-law the work for which she engaged a paid help at home. Money was not too plentiful in the youthful household.

What a toiling and drudging at those parquet floors in the wide landings—what a sousing and splashing of the large asphalt courtyard. She revelled in the work, proud of every task which she could take off Camille's hands, and proud also

of the fact that she, a woman of nearly fifty, could do the work as well as a young girl.

And then, after her labours, the half-hour's pleasant chat in the somewhat dark but comfortable loge . . . the baby had done such and such a thing . . . what a little rogue already! . . . and he had slept all night . . . and now he was sleeping again . . . no wonder he was such a monster . . . Hortense doted on the boy! And she would linger on for another ten minutes, for since Gabrielle went to the hospital in December, she had a standing agreement with old Antoinette, who was most punctilious, never left the loge, enjoying the change, the fire, and her cup of coffee for nothing.

But on this *grand terme* morning, Madame Carpentier, was "At Home" to the house.

At about twelve o'clock she had put away the bank-notes in sheaves of five, the sous in piles of ten—like a bank, she thought: Émile insisted upon a punctilious administration.

When Carpentier returned at twelve o'clock he went straight to the cupboard and counted the sheaves and piles roughly. . . . "Some one has not yet paid": it had not taken him a minute to come to this conclusion.

"Madame Lourty," said Hortense: she was waiting for the remark, in order to give the correct answer.

Before the clock struck half-past twelve, Carpentier was at the Lourtys' door with the receipt.

Etienne opened it.

"Father is out," he said.

"And your mother?" the man said impudently.

The child hesitated. "Mother!" he cried.

Madame Lourty appeared. She knew what was coming. Her voice trembled.

"I am expecting my husband home any minute . . . do you mind waiting for a quarter of an hour?"

Carpentier felt that the little apt phrase had been rehearsed beforehand and was untrue: no woman would look so upset

if her husband were on the point of coming home with plenty of money. He shrugged his shoulders and threw a scornful glance at her: "Monsieur Reuilly will be here before two o'clock": Monsieur Reuilly was the landlord.

With knitted brow he slowly folded the proffered receipt. "In that case . . ." he said, and dawdled down the stairs.

It was the first time that Madame Lourty was unable to pay her rent.

A week earlier, filled with anxious forebodings, she began to inquire: "Alphonse, you have got the money for the rent all right, haven't you? . . ." It ought to be there, she knew that, if only he had not spent any money on unnecessary things, but when could she be certain that he did not do that? He had not made any foolish purchase such as, in the beginning of summer, that half-dozen white waistcoats, or in October, those three walking-sticks at the same time, but there were so many other things of which she could not keep count. . . .

Lourty for the last few days had been in one of his most morbid and melancholy moods: "Oh . . . that money . . ." he said with a dismal look, weighed down by a distaste for everything and terribly weary, "always that money. . . ." In his voice lay all the loathing and scorn of an impotent hatred.

When he was in this frame of mind, Madame Lourty often feared that he was struggling against an impulse to commit suicide; it was like an unknown, deep, dark cave, in face of which she trembled and closed her eyes, and then she just went on doing her best to clear away all difficulties and to create a happy atmosphere about the house, for the sake of Alphonse and Etienne—and for her own sake as well. . . . She was so tired, so hopelessly tired, of all this trouble and all this anxiety, which never gave her any respite. Too often she felt her old strength of will getting weaker and a sense of cowardice steal over her, which made

her want to leave things to take their course. The rent was not mentioned again.

But on the previous evening, Alphonse had come in unexpectedly with his hat on, his stick in his hand, and his winter coat over one arm: he was very red in the face. "I am just going to the post office," he said; "by the way, you will have to spare me a hundred francs of your housekeeping allowance to-morrow. . . . Here are the other seventy-five. . . ." He laid a bank-note and five francs carelessly on the corner of the table by the door. . . .

A hundred francs . . . she did not even have enough for the fortnight which was still to come! A hundred francs. . . .

She said nothing and asked no questions. She knew how pathetically Alphonse could prevaricate when he tried to explain a deficit.

She slept barely two hours during all the long night. Her nerves strung to the utmost, she evolved plan after plan, rejecting each one in turn. . . . She thought of selling things, pawning them . . . her bracelet, her watch, a couple of rings . . . or of going to her friends, the Clairets, in Boulogne. . . . They were always so sweet and sympathetic, Elise and Angélique, both of them . . . she felt sure that they would be willing. . . . But how was she ever to pay them back? . . . And how could she be home in time? It would not be possible. . . . She could not leave until Alphonse had gone to his office. . . . Oh! the terror of the humiliation which those people in the loge would inflict upon her, their raillery, the torture of their malicious glances, all their affable insolence. She lay covering her glowing face with her hands, as if, even in bed, she wanted to hide from their persecutions. . . . But, in the morning, driven by the necessity to act, she regained her self-control. The only thing which was left to her was to have the money telegraphed by Alphonse's brother in Orléans. . . . As soon as

she knew the post office was open, she went out in order to send the wire. She thought, as she wrote her short request, that it was lucky he lived in Orléans . . . she would not have had the courage to ask him personally. Lourty's sister-in-law, a very worldly woman, always treated her ultra-pleasantly, with a sort of tranquil pity, which she detested. Andrée talked to her in a sweet patronizing voice, which concealed a nervous irritation, about the stupidity of people who were not able to make their way in the world, and a certain touchiness, because these people were so closely related to her husband, and so-called sympathy about Alphonse's illness, in which she did not believe. . . . Madame Lourty remembered the condescending tone of the little note which came at Christmas-time, along with that most expensive hamper. . . .

She felt a momentary repugnance, which she overcame. She must send that telegram. After all, Henri was not like that; she would wire to his business address . . . and besides, there was no other way out. . . .

In the chill, grey, early morning, she walked, shivering with apprehension, across the misty Place de l'Observatoire. She hastened her lagging footsteps, so as not to waste a minute: the money must be there by twelve o'clock; but suddenly, when, on the other side of the Boulevard Montparnasse, some one went into the little black post office, she drew back. She pictured herself there, in the still empty place, waiting at the window, after handing over the form: the lady behind the wire-netting counting the words would read her cry of distress . . . she would look at her inquisitively, pity her. . . . As if naked in her misery, she would stand there before that strange and yet familiar woman.

Her faltering footsteps carried her half-way across the Boulevard; then she suddenly turned round and hurried homewards. . . . No, not there, it was impossible . . . to a less well-known *bureau de poste*. . . . She would go to the

little dark office in the Rue de Vaurigard. . . . But no sooner had she reached the Rue Barral, than she regretted this weak-mindedness.

'If only she had persisted it would have been over by now . . . the other bureau was ten minutes' farther off; the Luxembourg would not be open . . . she had lost at least a quarter of an hour!

She ran to the post and hurried back again.

When she came upstairs she found Jeanne there. Madame Lourty hinted at her trouble.

"Courage, Madame," Jeanne said cheerfully. "Courage, it will be here by twelve o'clock. . . ."

Madame Lourty smiled at her wistfully: she was not ashamed of her helpless condition where Jeanne was concerned; it was an immense relief to know that the other woman now shared her troubles with her.

As if by mutual consent she set to work with feverish ardour in order to shorten the weary time of waiting.

Madame Lourty kept on her coat, and placed her identity papers beside her hat and gloves, so as to be able to go for the money immediately on receiving the notice.

Never before had Jeanne found it quite so difficult to leave Madame Lourty's apartment. On the stroke of nine, the little woman herself felt as if some secret consolation were being taken from her, although they had not exchanged another word on the subject. "It is only nine o'clock," was all Jeanne said, when she left.

Etienne had already gone to school, in his usual boisterous fashion; at about half-past nine Lourty made his appearance. At a little table in the drawing-room, by the gently burning stove—he insisted on this as he could not stand running backwards and forwards and household activities about him—he breakfasted.

Madame Lourty heard him groan and mutter away to himself. Her mind was already in an overwrought state,

so that the torment of the melancholy dismal whispering behind the closed door, seemed to her unbearable. When at last, his unhappy debauched-looking face redder than it used to be, but sterner and thinner, emaciated with passionate thoughts, he stood in the little hall and pulled on his coat to go to his office, she said: "You had better have your lunch at Brocart's, Alphonse; I may have to go out. . . ." She handed him 150 francs. It was better for him not to be at home in case of difficulties. He had not spoken another word on the subject of the rent.

For a moment, in the grey mist of all her immediate anxieties, yawned the immeasurable black terror of the future.

And then, alone in the silent rooms, began that distressing vigil, around which strange fancies loomed and vanished in the tedious wake of long minutes, which stretched themselves into hours.

Sometimes, during a few seconds of forgetfulness, her thoughts wandered away to more concrete images: back to the first few months of her marriage, bewilderingly happy at times, and almost terrifying too . . . the sweet time of expectancy . . . but very soon the smarting pain of her first miscarriage . . . the racking distrust, on the second occasion . . . the subsequent discovery of what Alphonse was doing . . . and later, Etienne's birth, after many years of disillusionment. . . .

And Etienne . . . he resembled his father in so many ways . . . those eyes, which could look so feverish when he was excited and the other day, when she went into his room unexpectedly, he seemed so curiously startled. Etienne! Would he turn out well? She was often tortured with this question.

Then, returning to realities, she saw that it was only a few minutes later . . . the hands of the clock seemed stationary. . . . As her exhausted nerves relaxed for one mo-

ment, she took a brighter view of things. . . . Perhaps Alphonse might keep going in his municipal post, which taxed his strength so little, and where, with a doctor's certificate, no one was too particular about hours of work. . . . He was able to rest a good deal. . . . And Etienne, he was still so young, a child of ten—her good influence might work wonders yet. . . .

A quarter to eleven . . . her telegram must surely have arrived long ago. . . . If only Henri would wire back at once . . . she had not mentioned for what purpose it was . . . a hundred francs deeper in debt. . . . And what about the following quarter? . . . Supposing the rent was raised. . . . Oh, if only the money would come. . . .

Shortly after eleven, some one knocked at the door. . . . "Monsieur Henri Lourty is away . . . the telegram will be forwarded." With trembling hands she signed the receipt and gave the messenger his two sous. . . . Even before she read it, she knew that her hopes had been in vain.

And again the never-ending minutes elapsed: by half-past eleven she realized that the money could not arrive in time—there was no doubt about it, she would be forced to endure the humiliation of having the Carpentiers at her door with the receipt, which she would refuse to pay. And her dull worn-out brain tried to find a suitable explanation for her refusal. . . .

There was another ring at the bell at ten minutes to twelve. "Perhaps," she thought with a sudden flicker of hope. . . . It was Jeanne. She just peeped round the corner of the door, and remained standing with the latch in her hand. "I have come to ask," she said, "whether Madame has been helped?" With a pathetic expression, the little woman shook her head.

"Courage, Madame, courage!" Jeanne said huskily and ran off.

Etienne came home from school. He was troublesome

when he noticed that his father was not expected home, whined to be allowed to sit at the little table in the drawing-room which had not yet been cleared; he was also cross, because, nosing round in the kitchen, he discovered that his mother was heating up a dish which he did not like. Peevishly he pulled open the dining-room door wide, to shut it every now and then with a bang. "Etienne, my child, do be good to-day!" the little woman implored.

. . . More than half an hour after Carpentier had come to the door with his receipt, Jeanne came upstairs again. She looked very pale and panted for breath after running up the stairs: her nostrils were distended above her laughing mouth, and her slanting eyes were deep and black with joy. On tiptoe, with springy footsteps, she came into the dining-room, bringing with her a gust of fresh air.

"There!" she said, still panting and with a sigh. A heavy handful of silver coins tinkled dully on to the table-cloth: they were the hundred francs; she laughed and blushed. She had borrowed twenty francs from Madame Dutoit, and thirty from Dr. Valency; she possessed thirty herself, and the other twenty she had managed to wangle in her own quarter, ten from her dairywoman and ten from her grocer. "What . . . you . . . Madame Bonneau?" Dr. Valency had said, astonished. Madame Dutoit refused at first, and her shopkeepers had looked at her with suspicion. It was all one to Jeanne, and she had lied like a trooper, itching for them to give it. Quick, quick, there was no time to lose. And, thank God, thank God, here it was, on the table!

. . . "No, Jeanne, no, Jeanne . . ." stammered Madame Lourty. She began to sob nervously; then, in the midst of her tears, she smiled weakly at Jeanne; bewildered, touched, overwhelmed with gratitude, she gazed for an instant into her shamed glad eyes.

But Jeanne, also nervous, divided the scattered silver into two rolls.

"Madame must hurry," she urged; "quick, they must not come up with the receipt . . . and . . . and Madame must not cry . . . they must not notice anything . . . quick. . . ."

The little woman did not ask again how Jeanne got the money or whether she could spare it. She allowed herself to be ordered about like a child, and fetched the seventy-five francs from the bedroom. She washed her face and powdered her nose; only two things were quite clear in her mind: she must not give herself away to the people downstairs, and Jeanne must never know that Carpentier had already been with his receipt.

Beside the large arm-chair, taken from its usual corner by the window, Carpentier stood and watched the man's puffy red hands arrange the piles of coins on the table.

When Madame Lourty lifted the door-latch, Carpentier looked over his shoulder with a startled face, and the other one, who had the broad good-natured countenance of a dog, peeped round the edges of the chair-back with naïve curiosity. The little woman saw quite well that they had been talking about her. This sent the blood flying to her cheeks immediately. But she stiffened herself.

"I have kept you waiting . . . I am sorry," she said, and rather agitatedly she counted out the money on the table. . . . It took a long time, as it was all silver. . . . "Oh," she thought, "they must see that I have borrowed it, those rows of coins—five-franc pieces, two francs, francs, obviously raked together . . ." and when in the end she was forced to make up the amount with a couple of half-francs, she would have liked the ground to swallow her up. Carpentier hid his disappointment under a cynical smile, a more spiteful expression than he really intended creeping into his squint eye.

"And Monsieur Lourty's health is none too good yet, is it?" said the landlord with a jovial familiarity, which hurt the little woman to the quick. He leant snugly back in the velvet arm-chair, and his suspicious searching eyes were full of all the disagreeable things with which Carpentier had just been regaling him.

"My husband is *very* well," said Madame Lourty. She wanted to say it quite casually, but her voice was pitched unusually high, with a catch at some of the words. . . . It sounded mendacious . . . she noticed this herself and blushed.

"Monsieur Reuilly knows Dr. Besnard," said Carpentier in officious explanation.

The little woman overcame a nervous trembling: here it was again, this inevitable environment of hostility, hemming her in on all sides, from which there was no escape. All at once her manner became stiff and terrified . . . she could not talk to these two about herself and Alphonse.

"The receipt, please," she said, much too sharply. Carpentier took, from the little wooden clip on which he always kept the receipts, the last loose leaf, and handed it to her with a disapproving face. She gave a hurried nod, and departed abruptly.

Reuilly looked at the concierge.

"A difficult woman," said the latter, "irritable, very touchy. . . . The other day she was frying cutlets at an open front door, the smell went right into the senator's apartment. . . . I wish you could have heard how my wife was received, when she dared to find fault with her."

"Indeed," Reuilly said thoughtfully, "and the husband, you say, is beginning to bother the people in the house as well? . . . Indeed. . . . Yes . . . Besnard did not think they would keep him much longer at the Hôtel de Ville. . . . Enfin, we shall wait another quarter . . . what was it you suggested, again?"

"The raising of her rent," said Carpentier eagerly. . . . "We have arranged it all. . . . And about that shop for priests' hats, have you thought about that any more? . . . The *bourgeoise* counted them yesterday—fourteen black-coats up the stairs in one afternoon.

"Well . . ." Reuilly said evasively, "we shall see . . . as long as there are not forty . . . not too much zeal, Monsieur Carpentier . . . not too much zeal."

At that moment Aristide came past the loge-door. "Besides, if I interfered at all," he continued, "it would be . . ." He looked towards the hall, where they heard Aristide going up the stair. "Little artists and their girls don't really belong here. . . . He may be a charming boy . . ."

Carpentier pursed up his lips knowingly under the ragged moustache.

"A little artist with a big future! Just wait! Already he receives orders from society people. . . ."

"Indeed," Reuilly said approvingly; in his own way he was interested in art.

Carpentier was going to say something else, but Aristide, who had turned, when he got half-way up the stairs, appeared at the loge door: he came in.

"Bonjour, messieurs!" he said courteously.

"Monsieur Reuilly . . . the landlord . . ." said Carpentier with a respectful and pleasant introduction, as if this must be a memorable meeting for the younger man; there was in his voice a mixture of importance and flattered intimacy, common to the confidants of great personages, in the presence of a third.

"I thought so," said Aristide, while Reuilly looked at him in a fatherly manner, "that is why I came to find out . . . in case I thought of moving . . . when must I give notice?"

"If you want to move on the 8th April, give notice before

the 8th March," Carpentier said, more formally than he would have done if the proprietor had not been there.

Aristide nodded several times in succession, as if to indicate that this was quite convenient.

"Monsieur Baroche wants to leave us then?" Reuilly inquired with a wink at the concierge: "I bet our *grand artiste* will elope with a countess at least!"

Aristide laughed. He stroked his little beard, his violet-grey eyes gazed steadfastly into life.

"I was thinking," he said amiably, "about looking for a real studio in the Rue Vaurigard, for instance . . . an unpretentious little studio. . . . An artist must in the first place provide himself with suitable surroundings."

Reuilly nodded, as if he understood all about it. With a condescending smile he said that the Rue Vaurigard sounded like a good omen, so many great men had started there. . . .

"Perhaps you will come and buy a picture from me, later on, when I live next door to Gerôme, in the Rue Notre-Dames-des-Champs!" Aristide said jokingly.

"No," Reuilly answered with a laugh, "I shall wait until you have a fine house in the Avenue du Bois!"

Aristide agreed with a graceful gesture, and with a courteous wave of his soft grey hat he went out of the loge.

II

That evening after supper, as usual, Madame Dutoit got out of her cash book the rent receipt and handed it to Herz. While she rolled up the table-napkins and put them in the drawer of the sideboard and sat down again at the empty white table—they always left the cloth for the next morning's breakfast—Herz in his slow and deliberate way turned to the bureau, laid the folded paper beside him and unlocked a compartment. He took from this a bank-note of a hun-

dred francs, his share, and gave this in his turn to Madame Dutoit. Then, as if only now he had a right to the receipt, he unfolded it, and turning half-way towards the light, he read carefully each word which was filled into the printed form, peering very sharply at the signature and the date. Then, with his little round-shouldered Jew's back—the only outward sign of his race—bent across the desk, he found in another compartment the yellow envelope in which he kept all the rent receipts, since they started house together, and said happily: "The forty-third!" Madame Dutoit knew that this was coming: she had heard it many times before. Herz' voice on these occasions sounded so touchingly glad and grateful that she herself felt a lump in her throat; it seemed to her the most beautiful moment in the whole three months. The next moment he looked at her gently and very thoughtfully, as if all sorts of things were on his mind, which he did not like to utter. . . .

"What is the matter, Charles?" inquired Madame Dutoit, anxious and curiously moved; she leant forwards and, across the white table-cloth, she stretched her hand out to his.

Herz stroked that hand; then, as if her kindness made speech impossible to him, he asked:

"Do you know why I went to Germany this year, after all, Germaine?"

With a violent shrug of her shoulders Madame Dutoit shook her head.

Without waiting for an answer and without any further introduction he continued:

"I have been worrying for a considerable time about your business . . . the hat-shop. . . . Times are changing . . . and I believe it will be necessary to do something about it, before it is too late. . . ."

Madame Dutoit's rosy cheeks coloured up quite suddenly, and at the same time there came into her eyes an expression of childish startled helplessness, which was almost touching.

And Herz, in face of such dismay, now spoke more freely, and with greater confidence.

Had she never been afraid herself? She got so excited over politics with Madame Bertin . . . but these politics did not exist merely for the sake of arguments: there was more in it than that. . . . Every year the number of her clients would decrease: the authority had been refused to such numbers of congregations, endless chapels had been closed, numbers of Fraternities secularized . . . not in reality of course, but it was just the outward part of it which mattered to her! And the thing which made him more anxious still was the separation between Church and State . . . for ordinary priests without a State income, poverty would be the order of the day, and a decreasing sale of her principal article, perhaps, in the end, selling nothing but the cheapest sorts . . . that would be the death of the priests' hats trade. . . .

Madame Dutoit's keen brown eyes opened wide with alarm and astonishment.

"Yes," she said, "I never thought of it in that way . . . and what you say about the *curé's* . . ."

He looked at her in his quiet sensible way, partly in pity and partly in humility. . . .

"I am so fond of your business, Germaine," he said all at once, from the depths of his heart. "I have always been so fond of it. . . . It was your parents' business, and you were managing it alone, when I saw you for the first time . . . and how pluckily! . . . you, who . . . and all these years . . . I have always admired you so much . . . and do you know what I often thought: if only her business were not quite so prosperous; if only she needed me a little more!"

His sallow cheeks became a blotchy pink, and shyly he avoided looking at the woman, who gazed at him with happy glowing eyes.

"I have always felt very sad about this separation of part of our lives," Herz said still more gently; "I have never wanted to say anything, Germaine, because, after all, you had such very much better prospects than I . . . but this puts a different complexion on the matter. . . . I cannot hide things any longer: I have had to warn you . . . and perhaps I shall be able to look after you a bit now."

He made a little joke to hide his emotion, but he was so excited and so embarrassed as he did it that it did not sound like a joke at all.

Madame tried to laugh: she was, if anything, more touched and confused than Herz.

"At last . . ." she said. "At last. I have waited eight years for this."

"Have you really . . . Germaine?" said Herz, childishly pleased and at the same time incredulous. Then, having calmed down a little himself, he saw her face more clearly: it was so happy that he did not doubt any longer. She got up suddenly, bumped into a chair in her effort to walk round the table, and kissed him with a more fervent passion than she had done for a long time; she hurt his gums, and their mouths sought each other in vain, and their awkwardness was as beautiful as a first love.

"Oh!" said Madame Dutoit, "whether or not you are right about politics, I don't care, but you can do as you like with my hat-shop!"

Then they took counsel together. Germaine got out her books and they calculated and compared. . . . On the whole, the business appeared to be still quite flourishing. . . .

For a moment Herz hesitated. . . . "At any rate," he said, "now you could still sell it, at a profit. . . ."

"All right, all right!" said Madame Dutoit; she felt very light-hearted at that moment, and even happier than on the day when she decided to live with Herz.

"And yet you will be sorry, Germaine, when you come to

do it," Herz said earnestly, as if he were afraid of this blind surrender. "You are more attached to your priests' hats than you think now. . . ."

She realized this herself; she had grown up among her priests and her father confessors . . . she was for ever arguing with them, and in spite of that they got on together—yes, she would miss them. . . . But the next moment she felt absolutely happy again a flash of her imagination brought back to her all those terrible days of torture and black misery, when Herz was in Lorraine . . . never to have these fears any more; to have certainty for the rest of her life. . . . Suddenly everything which had been dark to her became clear and simple . . . it was as if she had opened a door very gently and saw some very intimate thing, some never dreamed-of sweetness, which thinks itself unwatched. . . . What were all the other things compared to that?

Her thoughts still very far away, she inquired:

"What do you want to do? Another hat-shop, a joint one?"

"Another hat-shop? . . ." Herz said doubtfully.

Then suddenly he put before her his carefully thought-out scheme. He reminded her of a cousin in Saargemünd, who was managing-director, also part-proprietor, of the huge china works there. This cousin had promised to install him in a first-rate business . . . in the best part, on one of the large Boulevards, a good-sized shop, with all the factories' newest creations. . . .

From a separate drawer in his desk, Herz took a stout packet of pamphlets and price-lists. . . . This was why he had gone to Germany himself, that year . . . to see exactly how the land lay, to talk things over and make arrangements. . . . After that he had looked for some one who would take over his wine-agency business. . . . He had had

a great deal of trouble in striking a good bargain . . . very shortly he would have to decide. . . .

"But," said Madame Dutoit, full of anxious objections and not really listening to him, "all china-shops here stock that Sarreguemines stuff . . . our kitchen plates . . . your toilet set, all that common stuff."

Herz, quite sure of himself, shook his head. "Just common things," he said, "but not the real Sarreguemines *fayence*. . . . The ordinary people here are much too conventional to like that. . . . For instance, a coffee-pot which is any different from our shiny brown *filtre* would not be *le gout du quartier*—a *café au lait* cup must be of such and such a shape . . . and a soup tureen which is not round and does not hold enough for at least a dozen people, would not be a soup-tureen at all. But these works, or at any rate the china department, move with the times . . . they now make modern earthenware . . . beautiful dinner-sets . . . oh! not like those old things on the sideboard . . . quite different . . . 'New Art' . . . lovely stuff, rather like that new Sèvres shop on the Boulevard des Capucines . . . only much more reasonable . . . a toilet-set, for instance, with raised pinky-yellow peaches on it . . . so natural that you would like to pick them off . . . lovely!" And with a slight Jewish exaggeration, but after that very quietly and confidentially, he described colours and designs. . . . He showed her pictures of bowls and umbrella-stands and vases. . . . He could get a stock which would put all other Paris shops in the shade, and—he whispered mysteriously so as not to be heard by all the others, who were not present—"a percentage such as no one else would be given . . . because I am a relative! . . ."

They glanced at each other, he thoughtful and full of hope, she kindly and very grateful.

"There is no doubt that we should be able to compare with

any shop," he said modestly but very decidedly, and again he hunted for something among his papers. Madame Dutoit was by no means convinced about the uncertain future of her present source of income . . . and also she suspected vaguely that the selling of china, in a real shop, to all and sundry, would give her less amusement than the recommending of hats to her priests . . . not quite so dignified, and duller . . . her fathers were always so polite . . . so shy at times . . . they were so easily taken in . . . and yet the prospect of a large business in a good part . . . with herself as mistress of the china of Saargemünd. . . .

She was filled with a great wonder, that this Saargemünd which had haunted her was destined to become something good for her whole life.

CHAPTER 15

IT was the second week of January before Leguënné knew for certain that he was going to his Sénégal at the end of the month.

At the ministry, in the Pavillon de Flore, he went to collect his bounty; he was now a State employé foreman-compositor at the little county printing office in the African colony.

On the same evening, with Robert and one or two other friends, he painted the town red; they made short shift of eighty francs, emptying one good bottle after another; they drank good luck to the journey, to the Sénégal, to eternal friendship, and to the nigger girls. They ate oysters and ended up at the Bal Bullier. The next evening he took Gabrielle to see a naughty play at the Palais Royal, and gave her a hundred francs to pay off her debt.

Then he suddenly became very sedate, working the greater part of the day in their little garden in order to make his own travelling cases, for it was one of his fads that he must have boxes of all sorts of shapes and sizes which he would not be able to purchase anywhere. This was done in a most capable expert manner, but about his movements and particularly in his face there was always the look of a gentleman doing a joiner's job.

In the meantime Gabrielle sewed at his outfit. In the colonial department of the "Samaritaine" she bought white jackets and trousers and underclothes as patterns; she dragged Leguënné with her . . . and for the first time in many years the two walked the streets together. Leguënné was intensely amused, offered her his arm with a most

gallant bow, and behaved generally like a buffoon; Gabrielle giggled, and was afraid that he might say too ridiculous things to the shop-girl. She herself was not accompanying him to the Sénégal, but intended to go on living in her basement. Every month she would go to the Colonial office for the hundred francs which Leguënne was forced to allow her of his pay.

Never yet had she enjoyed life so much; her debt was almost paid off; she had the prospect of a settled monthly allowance; a husband who was at home all day in a good temper, and who would then vanish entirely. With an eye to her grass widowhood she bought herself a black velvet blouse which, in the meantime, she brightened up with a large violet tulle bow at the neck, most becoming to her. Ten times a day she came to see Leguënne in the garden, bringing him, with many lovesick glances, cups of coffee and liqueurs. They were bright, sunny, winter days.

Leguënne, in the early morning, when the garden was still white with the night's frost, worked there in his reefer coat, and he would think with a delighted grin of the hot niggerland where he would soon be, of the palm-trees and the deserts, where you could boil eggs in the sand. . . . You could run about there from morning to night almost stark-naked, and there was no winter at all. He considered his trip there an unqualified joke . . . he was so heartily sick of a pint at Père Bioudelinot and a pint at Barbotte's and a pint at Reluquard's, always the same old Paris; it was high time for some new adventures.

Now that he was going away he did not worry any more about the house; he worked, turned away from the windows, and decided that if they wanted to look at him, they would just have to see by his back that he cared not a fig for them.

Once Carpentier, wearing felt slippers and a dingy green apron, came outside to sweep up the paving-stones; his

salutation consisted of a hurried opening and shutting of his squint eye and a muttered: "Cold . . . work . . . garden."

Since their drunken orgy on All Souls' Day, that prig was most standoffish, as if he were terrified. . . . It amused Leguënne to hail him and ask him quite innocently when they would go out again together.

Carpentier cleaned his broom on the paving-stones, and threw him a side-long malicious glance.

"When shall we go out again together?" Leguënne inquired once more, this time in a shrill piping voice, as if he wished the whole house to hear.

"You had better go out with your wife these last few days," said Carpentier, and shuffled into the house.

Grinning to himself, Leguënne bent once more over his planks, and with a sharp tap of his hammer he drove a new nail into the wood.

He had manufactured a large flat box for his top garments, and a small flat one for his underclothes; now he was busy making some small square trunks . . . one was for his "library," and in another he intended packing all sorts of absurd things, with which to take in the niggers and the wild Frenchmen.

In the afternoon he set forth to buy a few odds and ends. From a street-hawker in one of the large Boulevards he purchased a mechanical rabbit; from an individual in a dark suburb, several packets of playing cards, which, when you held them up to the light, showed doubtful pictures.

Another day, he brought home a dozen assorted masks, and yet another day, firework cigarettes and Bengalese matches. In a bazaar, where he was well known, he persuaded the salesman to shift half the things in an attic in order to get at a few bags of confetti and some "rigolos," which were not yet in demand, as it was a month before Shrove Tuesday.

At a barrow in the Boulevard de Sébastopol he selected bright coloured enamel brooches, butterflies and pansies, costing five sous, for the nigger ladies, whom he was going to court; he also bought a little hand-mirror, which, when you breathed on it, displayed two naked ankles, a bottle of Sal Volatile and an enormous box of face powder. Late at night he secretly put the purchases into the trunk and padlocked it, for he wanted to make quite sure that Gabrielle's eager eyes would not spy into it, and every now and then during the day, while he was measuring and planning and hammering, all sorts of jokes would jump into his mind, ridiculous fancies, which sent him into peals of suppressed laughter, sometimes bringing Gabrielle outside.

During this last fortnight at home he insisted on doing himself well; every day they dined at a neighbouring chop-house. Gabrielle enjoyed it thoroughly, but when Leguënne was gloating over this Parisian fare, his *tripes à la mode de Caen* or his *gigot de mouton aux haricots verts*, he would often think, with an anxious grin, of the concoctions which the female negro cook might put before him, over there; a rice mixture with coco-nut oil, and poached ostrich eggs; a fried shark with a pepper sauce . . . and it amused him intensely to watch Gabrielle's wide eyes, while he enlarged on this subject. When the five trunks and boxes were all ready, strong and neat, he painted them a cheerful green, with large red initials on the lids, Ph. L. Phillippe Leguënne.

At the end of January, on a fine morning, at half-past six, Robert called for him in a "victoria." Together they loaded the five trunks on to the box, and on the folding seat; when the cabby remonstrated with him over the heavy weight, he said, bluffing it, for the last time in Paris: "Go ahead! I have packed nothing but my dead illusions; they do not weigh anything."

Gabrielle stood at the door to see him off. She wore her

black velvet blouse and a white-and-mauve striped shawl over her head, for the morning was cold.

"Adieu, ma biche!" said the courteous Leguënne with an elegant kiss of the hand and a deep bow.

Then—the pony, in its first morning freshness, trotting gallantly—he drove away in his "victoria," all red and green, like a triumphal chariot, and disappeared from the street.

Madame Leguënne went downstairs and cleared away all traces of the recent departure; then in the emptied rooms, where she would in future live alone, she sat down with a vague expression of astonishment, satisfaction and conquest.

But in the house, on the stairs and about the hall, she wandered that day and the following with a pathetically depressed face, which was wonderfully well suited to her new state; then very busily, in small piles, she delivered her sewing, so that she had an opportunity of meeting every one in turn, when she would, without saying anything, by means of a languishing smile and a raising of her eyelids, indicate the pathos of her loneliness. When hinting at the hundred francs a month, which would be hers, her air of timid modesty made every one believe that it was her husband's spontaneous generosity, as a reward for personal merit.

She continued to dine at the chop-house, and had a good tuck-in whenever her digestion allowed her to, went for a daily walk past the shops and slept every morning until nine o'clock.

But after a fortnight she began to be sorry that Leguënne had left.

There was now no uncertainty and no strain about her life; no longer was there reason to think "Will he come home? Will he stay out? Is he going about with women? Does he do silly things?"—no reason to lament when he did not come home, and to pity herself when he did.

Everything went on oiled wheels, one day after another, and she was always alone.

She no longer smelt the detested cigars and the vile odour of wine and absinth; she heard no sordid tales when he was half-seas over; she even missed the sly digs with which he persecuted her when things went wrong, and his crafty curses, when he was really angry. She need not fear anything now, and nothing could surprise her. In a morbidly tearful mood, she began to think of their last *réveil-lon* dinner: how they had laughed over his mustard pickles and his capers with the cock's comb.

She also remembered that for thirteen long years, by fits and starts, he had been her husband . . . in spite of her frail health, she could still be love-sick at times. She pictured his aristocratic face with the high bald forehead of a man-about-town and his thin-lipped laughing mouth, with its unexpected utterances.

She roamed about the house in her old grey morning wrap, sometimes even in the afternoons; but, in the evenings, she would suddenly emerge wearing a scarlet hat and a flowing scarlet veil, appearing again very late, when she would creep into the house. Madame Carpentier decided to follow her one day, to see what she was up to.

In the third week of February, the post brought news from Leguëne; just a picture post card depicting two naked negresses with nothing but a girdle round their waists: "One is my housekeeper and the other my cook," he had written underneath. That was all she heard of his voyage and arrival and life there. But it caused her a great deal of amusement; in fact, it cheered her up considerably, and with an ambiguous expression on her face, because it seemed to her a trifle naughty, she showed every one the card.

On the first of March, dressed sedately in black, she went to the Pavillon de Flore, received her hundred francs, and

bought, in the Grands Magasins du Louvre, a shot blue and green sunshade and a bottle of scent.

But on the same afternoon a second post card from Leguënné arrived: she must come to the Sénégal!

"Ma biche," he wrote, "you will sell your furniture, with which you will pay your debts. You will keep your sewing-machine, which you will have packed at Bailly, Place St. Sulpice. At the Ministry you will receive a sum of money for your equipment, but do not bother too much, the women here are very simple. And you will go by the ship which leaves Havre on April 3. Philippe Leguënné."

What a business!

That first day she went to every one she knew to ask for advice, insisted on hearing every one's opinion ten times over, made endless idiotic inquiries, as if she had never before heard of the Sénégal; but in her heart of hearts, she had already decided to go. She considered herself exceedingly interesting, felt unusually flattered, and wanted every one to know how inhumanly she was being tyrannized over.

On the second day, the whole neighbourhood knew that Madame Leguënné was going to the Sénégal!

Hortense Carpentier alone, with her rough Flemish tongue, told her the unvarnished truth.

"Ma chère," she said, "Leguënné is sorry that he has to leave those hundred francs for you each month. . . . 'Twice is quite enough,' he says to himself; 'I am not going to do it a third time.' And do you know what he hopes: that over there you will soon kick the bucket, in that beastly climate."

"Ask your doctor for a certificate, Gabrielle," Jeanne advised good-naturedly; "if he says that such a hot country will kill you, Leguënné cannot force you. You are well off here." But Gabrielle would listen to no one. She found that she could get a handsome advance for her outfit and passage, and she was going to the Sénégal. She began by

eating, one after the other, her three chickens. A fanatical expression had come into her eyes, and with a sentimental smile over her shrunken, sharp face, she talked with any one who would listen to her about her prospective journey. She bought her trousseau, bit by bit, in the Samaritaine, for she was much too nervous to do a stitch herself.

As luck would have it, Jeanne could help her about the sale of her furniture: she knew some one who would buy the bed for fifty francs, and who would take the kitchen stove for an additional twenty francs.

One morning, at the same moment, Madame Leguënne came up from her basement and Madame Lourty downstairs; both were dressed to go out. Madame Lourty had heard from Jeanne about the other woman's plans, and although her mind at that time was crowded with anxiety, she yet found time to say a few words to Madame Leguënne, showing her interest, but as they were going through the hall together, Jozette came in at the front door.

Then, with an abrupt deft movement, Hortense Carpentier shot out of her loge and, spreading herself with arms akimbo, she held the three women captive at the front door . . . she was egged on by a devilish impulse. Here were three of the four whom she had always wanted to expel from the house. . . . Gabrielle, enfin . . . but Lourty's wife and his sweetheart together! . . . And in order to keep them together just a little longer, she said the first thing that came into her head. . . .

"Perhaps Mademoiselle will buy your mirror . . ." and she pointed out Jozette to Gabrielle.

She was herself overcome with the aptness of this remark, and stood and glared at the others, with a broad beaming face and her heart aflutter.

Jozette, a little embarrassed, shook her head with a surprised question in her eyes. . . .

"Oh, won't you?" inquired the concierge's wife. A mocking light crept into her eyes.

With a slight shock, Madame Lourty discovered herself in immediate contact with the girl; and at the same moment she was struck by the little solemn face, with its look of lonely sadness. . . . Without knowing why, she was filled with pity, and instinctively she said:

"You are not looking very flourishing yet . . . but the fine days are coming now. . . ."

This was the only thing she was ever to say to Jozette. She hurried outside; Madame Leguënné followed slowly.

"I was thinking," said Madame Carpentier, as if to explain her amazing interference, "I was thinking, Mademoiselle is going to move, perhaps she may require something. . . ."

"Move?" Jozette asked.

"Did Monsieur Baroche not give notice last night for April? . . ."

Jozette felt as if the floor were sinking away from beneath her feet. . . .

"Ah . . . ça . . ." thought Hortense, "she did not know . . . there is going to be a rupture. . . ."

But Jozette forced her mouth into a smile: "We move in April, of course," she said huskily, but with immense pride. And she went upstairs.

CHAPTER 16

I

CÉLESTIN, full of good-natured solicitude, decided that he must warn Aristide.

He sat with his report, which was handed to him at the morning lecture, in front of him: his marks for the various competitions were satisfactory . . . but according to a mutual acquaintance, Aristide had for the second time a very bad one. Célestin was uneasy . . . these reports were sent to Roubaix, and their scholarship was most certainly dependent on good marks. . . . He must warn Aristide. When Célestin made up his mind, he liked to act at once . . . he would go early, so as to find Aristide at home. He filled his old-fashioned stove, covered the fire with a few shovels of ash, so that it would burn till the evening; he dressed himself.

Outwardly he had changed a great deal during the last few months, and the winter's hard work had reduced his solid cheeks, and consequently the lines of his face were more marked. He did not look quite so handsome as when he was fresh and rosy, but much more energetic and more serious. He no longer wore his tam-o'-shanter, but had purchased himself a most ordinary looking soft hat, which gave him the appearance of a more or less interesting clerk.

And before going out he glanced once again at the stove. The care of his fire was one of the chief concerns in his utterly simple life. They were welcome to give him coffee in the morning, which a beggar would scorn; they could give him a midday meal such as is served to the paupers in

a workhouse; his food need not be nice, but there must be plenty of it, and he must be warm.

As he walked along, he cogitated as to how he could bring Aristide to his senses. . . . He would have to be tactful, not make him obstinate, and yet speak with conviction. In spite of their estrangement, and in spite of his changed opinion of Aristide's character, there was still something left of the old feelings of admiration and indulgence. Nevertheless, he decided to be very firm, because he was not going in the first place for Aristide, but for Jozette.

As soon as he came into the room, he knew that something terrible had happened. At the untidy lunch-table sat Jozette, resting her head on her clenched hands, gazing sombrely in front of her: the knuckles were pressed against her cheek-bone, the palms supported the jaw and between the brooding eyes, which had obviously wept, was one black ominous furrow of despair.

At Célestin's entrance she scarcely moved, just took away one elbow and remained in the same attitude, her gloomy face resting on the other fist.

"She is annoyed about the report," Célestin tried to make himself believe. Soothingly he said: "Don't worry, Jozette, I have come to lecture Bibi . . . we shall force him to work harder."

But Jozette answered, with a strange, colourless, far-away voice, as if Célestin's remark did not really convey anything to her: "Has he not worked well?"

"No," said Célestin, "have you not heard about the report?" And still resting the chin upon the palm of her hand, her clenched fingers pressed into her cheek, Jozette began to talk in a fierce, husky voice:

"Know? Know? How should I know? . . . If you think he has gone to Roubaix because his mother is ill, and you hear a week later that he has been to Rouen with friends . . . when you think he hasn't a penny in his pocket and

you are told the next day that he has lent twenty francs to some one else . . . know? What do I know? . . . I have to hear from the concierge's wife, when I meet her in the hall: 'Monsieur Baroche has given up his room for April.' . . ."

"No, no, Jozette!" Célestin said, shocked.

But Jozette paid no attention to him; the sorrowful words burst like a dark flood, heavily charged with passion, on the ominous silence of the little room.

"And when I questioned him, he beat about the bush . . . he did not want to say anything; because *I* am so attached to this room . . . as if it had not always been *I* who said: 'Let us move: life here is too expensive.' He did not want to do it, but behind my back he does . . . behind my back . . ." Then there was a silence—a silence which almost broke with tension: Célestin was entirely bewildered.

"He wants to get rid of me," Jozette said all at once, in a clear calm voice.

She burst into a desperate fit of crying.

Her head had collapsed into one arm, and she groaned aloud, as if she were driving away a pain which she could not endure any longer.

Célestin felt a cold shiver pierce to the very marrow of his bones, and his heart was heavy with misery. This was all the other man could make of the little woman, whom he adored from the innermost depths of his being.

"Jozette," he said.

She shook her bowed head; then raised her face to him: the pathos of her gaze cut into his soul.

"Jozette," he said again.

She took a deep breath and answered:

"It is quite true, Bouboule; he wants to get rid of me . . . he does not dare to say it straight out . . . but I am in his way. . . ."

Her eyes were like two wide, black blurred depths, filled with tears: her mouth trembled.

Célestin jumped up: he sat down again in confusion.

His face was still very red.

"Of course, girls like myself always have the same fate, sooner or later," she said bitterly, and with a mirthless laugh.

"Jozette," Célestin said suddenly, with a catch in his voice, "if things are too difficult for you . . . if you are too sad. . . . Jozette, I love you so . . . let me help you . . . I love you so dearly . . . you are everything to me, Jozette. . . . If you would only let me do something for you . . . I would do anything, Jozette . . . I love you so dearly. . . ."

A strange dizziness came over him as he spoke. Then all at once, as if in the midst of a thick haze a light broke through and he was able to talk more calmly. . . . "I have worked hard this winter . . . and it was for you, Jozette. . . . I did not want to admit it to myself . . . and I wanted to think well of Aristide . . . but it was for you. . . . I have thought of it, Jozette; I have feared it . . . no, I have never hoped it, never . . . although it would have been the best possible thing, if what I feared came true. . . ."

Jozette looked at him with unseeing eyes; she did not understand a word of what he was saying with such difficulty. She felt as if her reason were being burned up.

"I cannot give you a life of luxury . . . I have nothing but my scholarship and a few savings . . . but I will work hard . . . I will always love you, Jozette . . . I would always keep you with me . . . I would marry you. . . ."

"Oh, be quiet, be quiet, be quiet!" Jozette implored passionately, "be quiet, Bouboule!"

Célestin grew very pale, and it was as if he had run somewhere with closed eyes and suddenly found himself at the edge of a yawning chasm.

Jozette smiled a vague, unhappy, little smile. She shook

her head, tried to say something, was not able to, then shook her head once more. She cleared her throat.

Célestin looked at her with an anxious questioning gaze: he would have liked to keep the words which she was about to utter for ever captive behind her lips.

"You have always been good to us, Bouboule . . . so good . . . a good kind brother . . ." and, as if driven by instinct—a violent instinct: "Any other man, if need be . . . but not you, Bouboule."

"Would you never . . ." he stammered again . . . "be able to . . . love me . . . as I love you, Jozette . . . a little, Jozette . . . just a very little?"

His eyes held Jozette's imprisoned; then, not being able to escape from his anxious urgent gaze, she said firmly:

"No, never, Bouboule."

Then there was a silence.

Célestin stood by the window and looked down into the garden at the almond tree with its little brownish-red buds. "The trees are late this year," he thought, with a sudden clearness; then he gazed on, in a daydream. He began to feel the smart of the irrevocable.

Through the charged stillness of the room Jozette's passionate voice droned on.

"Aristide has had all my love . . . all my love. . . . I used to think that I was fond of Thierry; I thought I was fond of that other one, who took me to Meudon. . . . I only loved Aristide . . . all those others . . . those others. . . ."

"Oh, be quiet, be quiet, Jozette!" Célestin implored in his turn. They looked at each other, as if they were on the verge of insanity.

"And Aristide does not want me . . . Aristide does not want me!" groaned Jozette . . . "he will not send me to Montmartre with forty francs . . . not with forty francs to

Montmartre . . . but all the same, he wants me to go . . . he wants to get rid of me, to get rid of me!"

Then, as if broken, she again fell forward into her arms and wept. Célestin's despair suddenly evaporated: he did not know what she meant when she spoke about those forty francs and Montmartre; the prosaic thought came into his muddled head that she was in need of forty francs and was alluding to this. . . . He talked very gently to her, and told her that if at any time he could help, would she please tell him so. . . . She knew everything, and need never think that, in doing so, she was putting herself under an obligation . . . she would always be quite free . . . but she must do this one thing for him . . . he must be allowed to help her in case of need . . . he would run home now, if she liked . . . he had no money with him. . . .

"You won't do anything rash, Jozette. . . . You won't do anything rash!" he said again, anxiously; and then, in a flash of realization, the truth was revealed to him: that this quiet cherishing of something very precious was over and done with, and that the future had nothing in store for him but aimless days, full of a torturing misery. . . . His large room on the top of the echoing house was silent and warm, his work waiting for him behind the closed door . . . like a strange and altered person, he would enter it again. . . .

From behind the turquoise-blue curtain came a busy tinkling of china being placed on a shelf. . . .

"Good-bye, Jozette . . . cheer up!" said Célestin all at once, and rushed off.

Jozette, outwardly much calmer, took the last few things from the table and put them away; then she sat gazing out of the window for a long time. . . . She sobbed once . . . now and then a tremor ran down her slender bent back. When, somewhere in the house, she heard a clock strike

two, she jumped up with a start, and went to change her clothes.

She dressed herself in a navy blue coat and skirt, which were laid out on a chair behind the curtain, covered her little swollen face with a thick layer of powder, and tied on a veil. Then she knocked at Mademoiselle Villetard's door.

She had not been to see her for several weeks. After her unsuccessful attempt at conversion in the autumn, the little woman had remained sullen and unresponsive for a time: the ex-governess part of her had not found it easy to forget that the girl had made light of her warnings. And Jozette, always proud, had immediately taken the hint. It made her feel very sad, and the real reason had never been clear to her. She thought Mademoiselle was offended because she had kissed Aristide so passionately in the door of her room. . . . Later on things had been put right again, and Jozette had spent several pleasant afternoons with her, and evenings too, the long evenings upon which Aristide left her alone . . . but the former sweet intimacy had not returned.

Jozette tapped again . . . she opened the door carefully. . . . Mademoiselle Villetard, her hands quietly folded in her lap, her little feet, shod in black, side by side on the low fender, was taking a nap . . . the creaking of the lock barely wakened her. In the half-open door stood Jozette motionless, and for an instant taking in with one sharp glance the small shrivelled form sitting there, in the black lace winter cap above the flat smoke-grey wavy hair; the smooth black dress, with, as its only trimming, the large gold brooch, pinning together the low collar at the neck, the solid gold brooch with its ornate gold rim round the oval lock of hair, covered with glass; the little old face looked older in sleep; then the veiled eyelids quivered in the awak-

ening, and the mouth was just open, with the ghost of a smile hovering round it, like that of a slumbering child.

"Who's there? who's there?" the old woman asked with a start. Then she laughed, shy because Jozette had caught her having forty winks. With her still sleepy roving eyes, she looked at the girl, closing the door, and then pointed to a chair at the other side of the stove.

"You need fires for a long time in these north rooms," she said by way of explanation.

Jozette smiled faintly; she glanced about her, rather aimlessly. . . . The room was a little stuffy, and the atmosphere was charged with the sweet mingled odour of eau-de-Cologne and camphor. Mademoiselle poked the dying embers of the stove into a glow.

Jozette was struck by the fact that the old woman did not, as usual, ask her why she had stayed away for such a long time.

"Unbutton your coat, dearie," said Mademoiselle Ville-tard, "you might catch cold afterwards; it is so warm here. . . ."

Jozette shook her head. She was not going to stay long, she had very little time . . .

"Really?" said the little woman, half stifling a yawn, and smiling again.

Jozette looked at her with the same, long, searching glance as when she came in, and noticed that Madame Villetard was wearing a black kid-glove finger on her left hand; she inquired about it.

Then the old woman told her in detail about the nasty cut which she had given herself with the bread knife: it had slipped . . . straight in—not much blood . . . there was almost an abscess . . . her fear of a whitlow . . . and what the chemist had given her . . . and so on and so forth.

Jozette appeared to be listening attentively, but more

clearly than the words she heard the voice with its high-pitched yet subdued tones . . . its naïve tones . . . the voice which she knew so well and loved so much.

Once or twice she shivered, as if suppressing a sob.

"Are you still cold, dearie?" Mademoiselle Villetard asked, astonished. For the second time, with quick short digs of her small crooked poker, she raked out the ashes of the fire. . . .

Through the little red glowing door came suddenly, with a mild explosion, some smoke and a crackling shower of sparks, right on to her slippers. She jumped and pulled back her feet quickly, and then bent down to see if the carpet had got burned.

"How much nicer the summer is, without these horrid fires, don't you think so?" she said.

Jozette got up nervously and walked to the balcony door. She leant her head on the window, cooling her forehead against it, and gazed outside. The conifer hedge by the left gate was a dull dark green, with brown faded patches here and there; the rest was barren and wintry; the long, green wooden frame, in which the carnations and the heliotrope and petunias had flowered in summer, was filled to the brim with a layer of withered leaves. Jozette turned away suddenly. Mademoiselle Villetard had secretly taken off one slipper, peering at it very closely to see whether by chance the sparks had left any little holes.

"My dear," she said all at once, "are you quite well? Jozette, you look so pale."

But Jozette, with a startled shake of her head, reassured her. She left the balcony doors, and sat down at the table with her back to the window.

They talked a little more in a desultory fashion.

Suddenly Jozette got up.

"Are you going already?" said Mademoiselle Villetard, but she did not put the question with much emphasis for,

owing to her interrupted afternoon rest, she still felt a trifle absent-minded, and their conversation was flagging. . . .

"I am very busy this afternoon, very busy . . ." said Jozette agitatedly. She bent over the old woman, who had remained sitting in her chair. When she put out her hand, Jozette suddenly took the other one from the arm of the chair, the one with the black finger. Very cautiously she brought the injured hand to her mouth, the thin, hard, blue, pulsing veins raised on the pink, taut, satin skin, the ice-cold hand with its black woollen knitted cuff, and unsteadily kissed the finger above the leather covering.

"Adieu, Mademoiselle, adieu!" she said.

"Good-bye, dearie," answered Mademoiselle Villetard, slightly astonished, and with a little yawn in her voice.

At the open front door, Jozette turned round once more; the light fell on her face, and behind her was the dark landing.

Her face was a waxy white like that of a dead person, whose wide-open eyes still see everything in life.

She saw the old woman shift her position as if she were settling down for another little sleep. . . . She looked up with a faint smile. . . .

Jozette's eyes were very bright, her lips trembled; she pulled down her veil hurriedly.

Then she disappeared.

II

When, that evening, just before the dinner-hour, Aristide and Célestin, who had waited for him at the end of the lecture, came upstairs, the little room was half-dark.

Jozette was not there.

They understood at once, as soon as they had closed the door behind them . . . there was an atmosphere of unreality over everything. . . .

"She must be out still . . .

"She must be out still . . ." Célestin tried to say, but the words stuck in his throat. Fear strangled him; he struck a match but it broke; he fumbled for another and lit it: by the light of the long, flickering, venomous, blue flame, which emitted an acid sulphurous smell up to his nostrils, the hot darkness seemed to him like a hell.

Aristide looked on, utterly perplexed, while the other lit the candle on the mantelpiece. But before the flame rose to its full height, Célestin dashed up to the curtain, pulled it asunder, and saw the empty spot where the brown trunk had stood.

"Her trunk is gone . . ." he spluttered.

Aristide, who had fallen down on the couch, threw himself, with his face against the wall, into the cushions, and began to sob nervously.

Célestin snatched the candlestick from the mantelpiece, and in a mad frenzy he hunted all through the little room, pulling open cupboards and drawers. . . .

Jozette! Jozette! . . . His adoring eyes used to caress each one of her movements, each object which belonged to her he knew, and he knew where she kept everything . . . at the back of the drawer; gone was the purple velvet box, from which he had so often seen her take her rings. Empty was the hook from which her hand-mirror used to dangle, the oblong glass in the frame of white enamel marguerites, which he had thought so ugly, and which he loved so well. . . .

Carrying the guttering candle, the hot wax dripping on to his hands, he stumbled about the room. . . . In a corner he found a crumpled handkerchief with red dots on it. . . . He sniffed at it, and the scent of faded violets came to him; he put it in his pocket. . . . And in the window-sill behind the curtain, which he raised, shone the smooth, black, miniature notebook, in which she used to write down her household

expenses and all the little things which she wished to remember . . . she had left it there.

In a sudden outburst of rage, Célestin kicked against the edge of the couch upon which Aristide still reclined, moaning fitfully.

"Brute, brute!" he shouted.

When Aristide sat up, startled, he noticed all at once, by the light of the candle, how across the painting above his head some one had cut, with a sharp instrument, two deep scratches, slashed right through the naked figure into the linen thread of the canvas. He jumped up.

"Voilà! . . . voilà! . . ." he cried dramatically, and stretched out one arm, indicating the picture.

Célestin, in later years, often wondered what Aristide could have meant by those first words; but when he heard them, he thought that the other one was pointing at Jozette's image in desperation. . . . Then he saw the two murderous gashes himself . . . and however hostile he might have felt towards this showy picture before, now its violation cut him to the quick, as if she herself had been slaughtered.

"She has done it with her hatpin," he said in a sudden flash of elucidation.

Aristide's eyes, like deep-set, black, burning coals, were riddles of fright and hurt vanity and relief. He gave a nervous, scornful laugh.

Célestin was overcome with a new paroxysm of rage. Then all at once he had an inspiration; he clattered the candlestick on to the mantelpiece, and ran out of the room and downstairs.

"Yes," said Madame Carpentier inquisitively, "Mademoiselle left a message, saying that she was going out of town for a week. She went at half-past three with a handbag. She told me that some one would call for her trunk which was on the landing. . . ."

"And who came . . . what sort of a man?" Célestin questioned anxiously.

Madame Carpentier's face was a study in tense eagerness, she sensed and smelled the catastrophe. . . .

"Did you not know she was going? . . . Oh, mon Dieu!" she said.

But fortunately she had spoken to the man, and could cross-question him, she went on to say. He was a porter from a parcels office in the Rue Louvois; he had been told to deliver his load at the Gare St. Lazare, and carried a note with instructions to give him the trunk.

"La Gare St. Lazare . . ." said Célestin.

He never thought of saying anything which would save appearances for Jozette and Aristide, but stormed upstairs again.

Aristide was sitting on a chair, in the middle of the room. At his feet were two empty drawers which he had taken from the little oak cupboard; when he saw Célestin, his pale face became even more drawn.

"It is not possible . . . not possible," he moaned; tears welled up into his eyes.

"But you wanted it! . . . You wanted it yourself!" Célestin exclaimed passionately. . . . "Did you not want it, then?" And in his bereavement and momentary aberration, Aristide told the unvarnished truth.

"Yes . . . but—not now . . . later."

There was a lengthy ominous pause. Célestin saw in the mirror, under the yellow light of the doubled candle, his pale head sticking out above the mantelpiece; his eyes were black smudges, and his nose was ugly and wide over his clear-cut mouth. Then he looked at Aristide, who was gazing into space with glistening eyes.

After several long minutes, their thoughts as it were in two hostile camps, they drew together again in anxious confabulation. The Gare St. Lazare? . . . Where could she

have gone . . . to Rouen . . . to Nantes? . . . Had she relations there? . . . Neither of them knew . . . could they not find out? . . . No, that was not possible at a large station, said Aristide, you would have to consult the police about it, and he did not want to do that.

"St. Germain Laye . . . Argenteuil . . ." Célestin mused. Then, his thoughts still centring round Jozette, he recollected how, in a burst of confidence long ago, Jozette had hinted vaguely at the death of her father and her dancing one evening at the Bal Bullier.

"If she is still alive, she is not out of Paris," he said confidently. "When she is unhappy she does rash things . . . we are more likely to find her at 'Le Moulin de la Galette' than at the Gare St. Lazare!"

"What is the use of looking for her? . . ." Aristide wavered. He shrugged his shoulders. . . . "Le Moulin de la Galette. . . ."

He considered this one of Célestin's foolish suggestions, and remarked obstinately at intervals: "Nonsense . . . impossible. . . ."

Célestin, in a state of violent excitement, sat planning a system of search through Paris, either with a few trusted friends or alone. At any rate, they had all the evening in front of them, and perhaps Jozette had not gone very far afield after all, and had only mentioned the Gare St. Lazare to put them on the wrong track.

And Aristide, fired by his enthusiasm, agreed: he would take the left bank, the 'Quartier Latin; perhaps Célestin would have a look on the large Boulevards and Montmartre . . . but she would not have gone there, because of her relations. . . .

They sat facing each other, in silence, for a space. Then Aristide said that he was cold and hungry . . . and suggested that they should go and have something to eat together.

It was the first time for many months that Célestin was

going to have a meal with Aristide; with a rush of pain he thought of their many outings last summer. There was a sense of strain as they walked together through the pale night; forlornly they sat opposite each other at their table without speaking.

Célestin could barely swallow; Aristide had not much appetite either, but seeing the other one's plate still half full while he himself had nearly finished, he excused himself with an "I am not a bit hungry, although I didn't have anything to eat at lunch time."

Célestin, in spite of his present violent dislike of Aristide, yet felt drawn to him, as the only thing which remained to him of Jozette. . . . What was she doing? . . . where could she be? . . . He was giddy, and his head felt as if it would burst. . . . He gulped down the lumps of meat . . . there was no time to be lost . . . the immensity of Paris appalled him . . . the desperate hopelessness of looking for any one there. . . . He thought of the peaceful house in the Rue Barral, where she still was in the afternoon . . . quite close to him, in that little room. . . . Why had he not caught hold of her, and pressed her close, and said: "I will not let you go, I will never let you go . . . you shall stay with me, on what terms I don't care, whether you love me or not. . . . I shall look after you always . . . and then later . . . possibly . . .

Now . . . was she still alive?—where . . . where? . . . He cursed himself for a miserable fool for going away without acting. What was he to do? First go to the Rue Louvois . . . to try and find that fellow who had taken away her trunk . . . then along the boulevard. . . .

Aristide, however, after a meal, felt more able to deal with the situation. "Jozette has run away from me, she must come back of her own free will. . . . I am not going to beg," he said.

"And if I bring her back to you?" Célestin inquired.

Aristide made a gesture which the other did not understand. . . . "Of course, I shall look for her at the cafés on the Boulevard . . ." he said with an air of depression.

That evening Célestin wandered about Paris alone, and hunted for Jozette.

He did not really know why he was looking for her. She would never go back to Aristide, and as a matter of fact he could not advise her to. . . . He was filled with a blind wild desire to know what she was doing and where she was. . . .

He had taken a bus to the Bibliothèque Nationale: he stood in the front and scanned both sides of the boulevards and the streets through which he went with anxious eyes. In the short dark Rue Louvois he found the parcels delivery office, but it was closed with heavy black shutters.

He went to the Gare St. Lazare—the trunk would most certainly have been taken there: perhaps he might be able to wait until she came for it, or sent some one. . . .

He stepped briskly along the wide empty pavements of the Avenue de l'Opéra in the dull white glimmer from the high electric globes. He boarded a passing bus on the way to the Gare St. Lazare, and remained standing outside under the iron steps.

At the Opéra he thought he saw Jozette, walking in front of the Café de la Paix. . . . His heart thumped. . . . He was in two minds as to whether to jump from the bus. . . . He looked again; it was not she.

When Célestin entered the vaulted station he found on some platforms a train with open doors and people about it. After peering into each of these sparsely peopled by-paths he walked the entire length of the wide main platform, and found his way to the left-luggage office. . . .

He asked the lady sitting there under the solitary gas-

jet, with her hands clasped round her knees, whether a brown trunk had been brought . . . one with leather straps round it. . . .

She looked up at him sleepily, then rose and came to the counter at the window and said: "The receipt." He explained to her that he had no receipt, and he just wanted to have a look to see if the trunk were there. . . . There were two letters at one side, J. L. in brass tacks . . . there might also be an address . . . Mademoiselle Leroy. . . . He wanted to know if Mademoiselle had arrived yet. . . .

The girl looked at him suspiciously; then she swept the racks, with rows of bags and suit-cases and boxes, with her eye . . . casually. . . . "Mademoiselle Leroy . . . well, I don't know . . ." she said, and yawned.

Célestin peered into the room, trying to discover that small brown trunk with its yellow straps. . . . "May I come in a minute," he pleaded, "just to have a look round myself? . . . I know it. . . ." Already his hand was on the knob.

"Pardon, monsieur," the lady said crossly, and bolted the door. She went away; he heard her talking in the next room. She came back without looking at him, and pulled down the thick glass window. Then she started rearranging some of the parcels on the rack.

Célestin called out to her: he told her that he did not want the trunk itself. . . . She turned half-way round and her lips moved; the dull tones, coming from behind the glass, were like the hoarse whisperings of a ghost: "You must give me your receipt."

He wandered through the empty waiting-room and again along the closed rows of platform entrances. . . . An engine whistle shrieked and trailed off into a faint laugh. . . . This was followed by a tremendous puff of white steam. . . . Remorse clutched at Célestin's throat. . . . "Idiot! idiot! . . ." he cursed himself . . . "why on earth did I dine first? If only I had taken a cab to the station

immediately . . . perhaps she would have been there still! . . . Oh! oh!" he groaned aloud.

Once again in the dusky Rue de Rome, he suddenly saw Jozette in front of him. . . . A mad joy surged within him. . . . He caught her up with alert smart strides. . . . She turned round, and two shiny glistening eyes under black bands of hair and a pale loose mouth in a sallow face smiled at him:

"Tiens, mon vieux," said the woman, "you are in a hurry . . . I like that!" She tried to put her arm round his waist.

Célestin tottered backwards. "Ah, non, non," he moaned, and turned away. She laughed out loud with another female who joined her. And a few blocks farther on, he was again spoken to, this time by an oldish woman in a fawn costume, with cruel blue eyes and carmine lips in a powdered wrinkled face.

These were the melancholy creatures who prey and roam in the chill evening streets round about the stations, offering the comfort of their warm bodies to lone travellers who in the night enter a vast sleeping Paris.

Again he was overwhelmed with the hopelessness of his quest. . . . Where could he go? . . . Everywhere yawned black streets, and all of them had several crossroads, from where he could again turn down endless black streets . . . where? . . . where? . . .

All at once he remembered again that tale, told him long since, about her evening at the Bal Bullier. . . . She might have gone to the Moulin Rouge, or to the Moulin de la Galette, or the Quatz' Arts. . . . Somewhere . . . somewhere . . . he would find her!

As he climbed up the Rue Blanche, he began once more to be tortured by the thought that it would be very little use if he did find her . . . she would never go back to Aristide, and she would never allow himself to do anything

for her. . . . Why, oh why, had he not curbed his feelings in the afternoon? . . . What an egotist he had been, thinking in the first place of himself . . . and still, even yet, he hoped that he might have been able to win her, if only he had been more prudent. . . . He ought to have been silent for her sake. . . . What did his love amount to after all? . . . It was his miserable love which had withheld her his support . . . he ought to have helped her without showing his feelings at all. . . . That would never be possible now . . . nevertheless, he must find her, he must see her. . . .

He wandered about Montmartre till it was very late, looking and gazing until he could scarcely see: he went into one café after another; sometimes he said, "I am trying to find a lady," looked about him and departed; occasionally he ordered a drink, left it untouched, and went out without paying so that the *garçon* heaped insults upon him—he did not notice it; sometimes he emptied a glass in one greedy absent-minded gulp. . . . Once he found that he was dragging himself up the steps of the Moulin de la Galette, moaning aloud, "Why, why not?" until a merry jeering throng began to chaff him and he stormed upstairs like one possessed. Later on he noticed that he was very cold: he was sitting outside a deserted public-house on the Boulevard de Clichy.

At about twelve o'clock, when his purse was empty, he drove to the Rue Campagne Première to get some more money. His head was feverishly clear; the rattling wheels of the cab on the cobblestones of the sloping streets sounded like the blowing of trumpets to his roused imagination; the noisy drive through the dark, empty, subterranean-looking streets seemed long. He began to calm down a little.

On his way back, as he walked past the Rue Barral, something urged him towards Aristide's house. . . . He thought:

"How lonely he must be, and perhaps he is waiting for me. . . ." Célestin felt anxiously vague. . . . He was shivering and shaking, as some one does who has wept too long over an irreparable grief and instinctively seeks out some old familiar spot.

The bell tinkled dimly in the distance; the door opened . . . he shut it again, cautiously shouting his name into the ruddy glimmer of the loge; then, going into the black darkness, he began to feel his way up the high stairs, very slowly, because his weary legs were like lead.

For a moment, like a golden flash of light, came the wonderful thought: Supposing Jozette had come home! If, when he knocked, Aristide's face, flushed with joy above his white shirt should peep round the door and say, "Bouboule, old boy, she is here again, everything is all right; many thanks! . . ." but he knew that this would not happen. . . . Perhaps Aristide would not even be there himself. He had a little difficulty in finding his bearings; he got to the little landing, he knocked, there was no answer; he felt that the door was not locked, and opened it a little nervously.

In the flickering light of the candle, which had almost burned down, Aristide was stretched across a few pillows and sheet which had been hurriedly improvised into a bed, a blanket loosely over him, and slept. His head was turned towards the room, and one long, slim, pink hand hung down against the red coverlet, which was still visible: his breath fluttered at regular intervals, like a gentle breeze over his calm face, and about his mouth hovered the suspicion of a smile. His long thin neck was bent, revealing the vertebra sharply defined under the taut skin. Célestin's first impulse was one of despising hatred, but the other looked so guileless and unsuspecting—like a child in a deep innocent sleep. . . . Célestin's face relaxed; for the first time that day there was a gentleness towards Aristide in his

heart; he could almost forgive him. He moved the candle, which was shining into the sleeper's face, and closed the door behind him.

Full of a great sadness, his head faint and rigid with grief, he crept homewards, shivering through the cold night streets.

CHAPTER 17

I

"MY dear lady," said Dr. Besnard, in the tones of jovial familiarity which he only kept in check when dealing with his few more wealthy patients. He drew up his chair and placed a massive red hand on Madame Lourty's own. "My dear lady, the patient is not so well!"

Madame Lourty instinctively pulled back her arm.

"But the day before yesterday, you yourself said . . . I don't believe it," she said rebelliously, as if by resisting violently she could ward off this impending disaster.

"No, no," said Dr. Besnard, ruffled at being contradicted. Then he smiled compassionately, well accustomed to the pig-headed stupidity of the layman. And propping his hands on his widely separated knees, he inclined his portly body towards the little form and gave her further details about his examination. He told her that the patient's psychic condition was more abnormal even than usual. Yesterday there had been greater excitement, to-day depression; the power of resistance was being undermined, the pulse was weaker, he was not looking so well, a number of symptoms which warn the medical man . . . and worst of all, the feeble memory. Had she not noticed how he purposely put all sorts of questions which the patient could not answer?

He asked this with an undisguised self-satisfaction, for he was pleased with the manner in which he had diagnosed the case.

The little woman shivered again; her pale hands grasped

each other convulsively, but she pulled herself together and nodded her agreement.

Doctor Besnard rose, as if with a sudden inspiration, and with cumbersome, yet agile, movements—he suffered from lumbago—he went once more into the sick-room. The little woman hesitated, then followed him.

Lying back on his pillows, spread out low because of his headaches, lay Lourty, who gazed with a puzzled expression at the foot of his bed. He usually looked ten years younger than he was, but now much older: his face, at other times hot and glowing, was now calm and pale, and the bright blue eyes under the heavy lids were dim like wilted flowers.

“Look here, Monsieur Lourty,” said the doctor impressively, so as to rouse the other man’s attention, “what about those powders which I prescribed for you last week? Have they been ordered again?”

Lourty slowly raised his listless gaze towards the flushed stertorous face opposite him, then looked away again, worried by those searching, bleary brown eyes, which protruded above the unhealthy bulging flesh beneath.

He shook his head vaguely.

“Have they not been ordered again?” the doctor repeated, in still more lively tones.

Lourty fluttered his delicately pencilled eyebrows: he was obviously tortured with headache.

“I believe so,” he said at last, unsteadily.

But the doctor, calling his powers of suggestion into play, kept it up.

“Try and think; it is most important.”

“I don’t know,” the invalid answered sadly. His face said that he had made an effort to remember, but could not.

“Enfin . . .” the doctor concluded, well pleased, “keep calm, please. Very calm—a*n* *reservoir*!” Then he beckoned the little woman out of the room and took leave of her in the hall; his face was triumphant.

"He did not have powders at all," Madame Lourty said, puzzled.

"Of course not!" cried the doctor, waving his hand in the air, "I know that!"

He had just wanted to convince her how uncertain his memory had become, even compared with three days ago.

"Oh!" said the little woman, rather astonished, with a pained sigh.

The doctor stretched his short stature to its full height in order to take his top-hat from the rack; with the door-knob already in his hand, he claimed her attention for another moment.

"Keep him quiet; rest is everything . . . and observe him. . . . If you notice anything unusual, let me know at once . . . peaceful distraction if possible . . . cheerfulness." Then he turned round as if he were suddenly in a great hurry and steered his way out of the door. The little woman went quietly into the bedroom again, but from the bed, with a movement of infinite weariness, a hand was raised and motioned her to go away; then she closed the door noiselessly and sat on the little sofa thinking long and dreary thoughts.

On the following morning, in one of his characteristic changes of mood, Monsieur Lourty was up at the usual time doing his cold-water cure. He breakfasted cheerfully and even ran into the kitchen to ask Jeanne to add hot milk to his glass, which he had allowed to stand. And because, according to the doctor's certificate, he was ill that day and was not expected at his office, they decided that Etienne should be kept in from school in the afternoon and that they would go to the Bois de Verrières. Spring had come!

Madame Lourty felt as if she had awakened from a bad dream; her head was as fresh as if she had just stepped out of a cold bath and she was able to face life in quite a differ-

ent way. Thank God! Thank God! her torturing fears had not come true.

The local train took them to Sceaux, and then, like three contented children, they walked along the road, pleased about being in the country, revelling in the rural scents and the glistening lights in the budding copses.

For months past Lourty had not been in such a good mood and so natural. He said repeatedly that he had hardly a trace of headache. He was a trifle quiet, owing to his very recent recovery, and his wife was too happy to be merry, while her eagerness to keep Alphonse well caused her to lower her voice. But Etienne was like a bird out of a cage and piped out his more vivid joy, drawing his parents' attention to everything which his quick child's eyes observed.

Transparent and bathed in soft sunshine, the hazy brown forest with its wide grass-grown parks lay on the other side of the road.

They turned into the third lane. A horseman came trotting behind them, galloped past and vanished into the depths of the dim sunlit maze of branches; the thud of the horse's hoofs echoed in the arid silence long after he had disappeared. When Etienne spied, among sandy tufts of moss and old leaves, the bright green primrose plants with their tender, flossy, pale yellow blooms and expressed a desire to pick them, they left the broad road and took a winding path right through the wood. The child rolled from right to left among the trees like a young foal, stooping and picking, and as they got deeper into the copses he found more and more. He seemed to fill the air with his shrill glad cries: "Another! Another! Bunches! Armfuls! Come and pick, too!"

"The boy should be in the country more often," said Lourty. And when, at last, panting and with glowing cheeks, he brought them his harvest, his mother wound a

handkerchief round the stalks and tied the bunch to the knob of her sunshade to keep it fresh, and then, tired with running, he walked quietly beside them, hanging on to his father's arm.

At two o'clock they went to the forester's house at the Rond-point to ask for some milk to drink with their bread and butter which they had brought. Before the house, in the shade, stood a green table with cane chairs: it was warm enough to sit outside. But the forester's wife came and told them that the morning's pail was already empty and that she was not going to milk until six o'clock. She had nothing but wine.

"A half-bottle, then, and some water," the little woman ordered.

She filled the glasses herself, for Etienne and Alphonse, more water than wine. When they got up there was still a glassful in the bottle.

After that they lay down under the large oak on the road-front itself. Lourty and Etienne stretched themselves side by side, spread handkerchiefs over their faces, and said they wanted to sleep. But it was only a game. From under the corner of their handkerchiefs each peeped at the other to see whether they could catch each other's eye; they would breathe with exaggerated regularity and suddenly explode with laughter. In the end it developed into a boisterous frolic; they rolled against each other and laughed until they were quite helpless. Lourty himself was the most exuberant: he pressed the child roughly to his side and dragged him across his body, and Etienne, jumping about on his chest, grabbed at his father's throat, shouting that he had won. The other, purple under the pressure of the small hands, laughed and spluttered, saying "Stop, stop," until the boy sprang to his feet and started pulling him by the legs across the ground. All at once Lourty disengaged him-

self, pulled Etienne down beside him; he was pale and dizzy and looked dazed, as if he were drunk. A little anxious, Charlotte tried to calm him.

"Look, Etienne, your bouquet is quite fresh still!" she said, trying to distract the child, and to her husband in warning tones, "Alphonse! Alphonse! You will have a headache afterwards. . . ."—"Curious," she thought, "he cannot stand even a single glass of wine."

But half an hour later, as the afternoon got cooler, Lourty's excitement had worn off. They got up and wandered about happily for a while; then it was time to go home, if they wanted to catch their five o'clock train at Sceaux.

Just as they were leaving the wood, Etienne's quick eyes discovered among a confusion of small green leaves a first wild hyacinth, the bud still packed very tightly but already showing a faint purple.

"Just a few weeks more and the wood will be blue with them," said his mother.

"O-oh!" said the child in raptures. Tempestuously he begged for another day at Verrière. . . . They promised him one. In the train Lourty began to feel very tired; between every two stations he fell into a fitful sleep.

And after that there were two more comparatively care-free days, although the little woman noticed that Lourty was out a good deal, leaving early and coming in late. Then on the fourth day, it was March 15th, Madame Lourty was standing by the sideboard in the dining-room, when she heard a confused hubbub rising up from the street. She ran to the window, pulled it open to look down. A crowd of people were gathered together along the pavement; Madame Carpentier gesticulating wildly, a young woman who, she knew, lived in their house . . . and behind three men who were holding him back, Lourty.

"Alphonse! Alphonse!" Charlotte shouted down, fright-

ened to death. She felt the floor sinking away beneath her feet.

For one moment the murmur of voices down below stopped; the heads were raised. She saw Alphonse struggle out of a man's grasp and fling himself into the house. . . . The noise of flying footsteps clattering up the staircase came nearer and nearer. She forced her unsteady legs to the door and opened it. Just at that moment Lourty came storming up the last steps. He panted past her, flew into the bedroom and locked the door.

It did not take her long to notice that his face was flushed and distressed, and his blue eyes glowing, glassy with fear.

"Alphonse!" She tugged at the handle. The door remained locked.

From the very depths of the house came the sounds of talking and shouting as if people were quarrelling, and of incessant nervous weeping; then heavy men's boots creaked up the stairs. Madame Carpentier's voice echoed loudly, ceased for a moment and was raised again. Madame Lourty locked the front door.

Inside she heard her husband stamp back and forwards from the window to the bed and from the bed to the window. He muttered to himself, in a state of wild excitement, but she could not understand what he was saying.

When for a moment both the walking and the muttering stopped, she felt as if her blood were curdling in her veins. Then began again the desperate tramping and muttering of unintelligible sounds, sometimes swelling into a smothered cry of agony as of some one being pursued in a dream who cannot get away. Sometimes it was quiet for a space.

She sank on to her knees by the door-post. . . . Each sign of life, however torturing, was a relief to her.

She did not know how long she had lain and listened; then all at once a tap at the front door and a voice: "The doctor!" It was Dr. Besnard.

"It is even sooner than I expected," he said, slightly embarrassed, as if Madame Lourty were going to blame him for a miscalculation. She, giddy after moving suddenly, leant weakly against the doorpost.

His purple head bent towards the keyhole, the doctor listened. In short broken sentences he told her how Madame Carpentier had sent for him . . . in his consulting-room. . . . He breathed deeply every now and then, because talking in this bending attitude oppressed him.

The little woman tried to stop him at intervals and listened more closely. For a moment it was quiet in the room, and she cried again: "Alphonse! Alphonse!"

Then the doctor was silent and listened for a long time; the walking had ceased, a chair was moved, the muttering continued. The doctor nodded and added a few words to his interrupted tale.

"I could leave you alone for a few minutes, but it is better not. Have you any friends in the house?"

Madame Lourty shook her head.

"It will only be for a quarter of an hour. . . . I must get help. Will you wait in the loge?"

"No," she said decidedly.

Then the doctor brought her into the dining-room and locked the door behind him. He also turned the key of the drawing-room door and the door of the apartment as he went.

Madame Lourty stood in the locked room and listened. A cool breeze came in from the street; she heard nothing of what took place in the house. Shivering, she went to shut the window. A terror which took away her breath clutched at her throat. What had happened? What was it? She could not remember the doctor's words. She thought she heard a sound and listened more intently. After a long pause she heard the door of her apartment being opened again and the doctor's voice, and another

deeper one filled the entrance hall. It was a relief and at the same time a greater strain.

Then came the shouting at the locked bedroom door and the rough voice of the doctor: "You must open the door or I shall have to take steps."

After the creaking of the key being turned in the lock, the two men entered the room. There was another silence. The minutes spent in this lugubrious atmosphere, which almost suffocated her, seemed like hours.

Sometimes she heard their rapid footsteps going to and fro into Etienne's room as well.

"Etienne," she thought all at once. "What am I to do when he comes out of school?" It was already half-past three. Her mind became a blank for a short time.

The lock of the dining-room door creaked; the doctor came in.

"Everything is in order," he said, "and the patient calmer than I expected. But it would be better if you waited for a few hours before going in to him. The attendant will sleep in Etienne's room. You will have to arrange to sleep with the child in the front room."

"But what is it? What?" the little woman implored.

"Just what I told you . . . nothing else . . . nothing else . . . no anxieties before the time. Everything will be arranged," the doctor said hurriedly, and evading the question. He could not stay any longer, he had a long list of calls to make and this case had taken more than an hour of his time. "I will come back and have a look at him this evening," he concluded.

At four o'clock Jeanne came upstairs. She wept when she saw Madame Lourty; her whole face trembled with suppressed nerves.

"Jeanne," said Madame Lourty, "for the last two hours I have lived in hell. Tell me what has happened."

Jeanne knew vaguely; it was Madame Giraud on the fifth

floor: Monsieur spoke to her on the street and walked along with her. Madame Giraud fled into the loge and Madame Carpentier said something to Monsieur about, "Now the first girl has run away, I suppose you will start on the second?" "Who has run away?" Monsieur asked. "That painter's girl," the concierge said. Then Monsieur lost his temper. . . .

"I cannot believe that Monsieur meant harm," said Jeanne, "I cannot believe it." Then she listened to the voices in the bedroom. They sounded calm and peaceful.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"A keeper," said Madame Lourty.

"I can't believe it," Jeanne repeated thoughtfully.

At a quarter-past four Etienne came out of school. He was in one of his boisterous moods. They heard him bang up the stairs, singing. Jeanne rushed to the door.

"Ssh! Monsieur Etienne," she said soothingly, "papa is ill."

"Again?" said the boy, bored, and suddenly dejected he sat down beside the empty parrot's cage and scratched his nail against the bars, as if he were playing a single-toned harp.

Only much later he said that the Carpentiers had given him a note, and he placed it carelessly on a corner of the side-board.

Jeanne and Madame Lourty were putting their heads together about the sleeping arrangements, but the little woman was too worried to come to a decision. All at once the sound of violent voices and the tramping of heavy feet burst forth from the bedroom.

"Alphonse!" shrieked Madame Lourty, and hurried into the hall. The door was locked. When she turned round she saw Etienne standing beside the dining-room table, his eyes fixed and terrified. She came back, her face amber-coloured; she shut the dining-room door.

"Papa has hurt himself, Etienne," she said, "he is in

pain," but Etienne said, making a terrible discovery:

"There is some one else in the room."

"An attendant, my child," she said, gently stroking his hair.

"They were fighting," he whispered, pressing nervously closer to her. He began to cry.

"Show Jeanne your picture post-cards," she said, trying to distract his attention, but he refused to do this, and buried his head in her lap.

Shortly afterwards they heard the doctor. He had kept the key of the apartment in his pocket. Etienne looked at his mother with the strange, inquisitive, frightened gaze which she knew so well. All three were silent. When the doctor joined them a moment afterwards he beckoned Madame Lourty into the sick room.

With his head resting on the low pillows, the blankets pulled up to his neck, Alphonse lay in bed. Madame Lourty saw a strongly built young man disappear into the small room.

"Here is Madame," said the doctor.

The invalid uttered a low moan but did not look up. He moved restlessly on the pillows as if he were in pain. But apart from this she could find nothing unusual, and yet she shuddered as if she were at the entrance of a dark cave full of horrors.

He looked at her vaguely, then his gaze wandered to a corner of the room and remained fixed there.

"No, no," he muttered; "No . . . be quiet. I cannot get away . . . and you . . . stop . . . stop!" An increasing terror came over his paling face.

"Speak to him," the doctor ordered quietly. Madame Lourty leant helplessly against the woodwork at the foot of the bed.

"Alphonse," she said in a feeble voice, "can I do anything for you, Alphonse?"

"Speak again," ordered the doctor, who was watching attentively.

The little woman tried to say some more, but Lourty, peering past her, whispered loudly, as if he were delirious:

"Yes . . . yes . . . I will . . . I must!" His eyes became ever wider and clearer.

"Valentin!" cried the doctor suddenly. He took hold of Madame Lourty's arm and pulled her out of the door.

In less than no time she saw the young man spring forward from the little ante-room, grasp Alphonse who struggled to raise himself from the pillows, and during that glance, as in a flash, she saw her husband's face, young and flushed, with a sudden rush of deep red blood to the cheeks, his eyes glowing and very determined; an ecstatic face—Alphonse as he used to bend over her in long-ago nights.

Then the room door closed behind her and the vision was gone. From inside came the sound of quarrelsome voices and the shuffling of feet, like what she had heard in the afternoon. At the sideboard the doctor poured out some water and made her drink.

"It is nothing, it is nothing," he said quickly, "quite an ordinary symptom in this illness . . . an hallucination. Your husband thinks that his imaginary sweetheart is calling him. . . ."

Madame Lourty, with a blush of shame and a terrified movement towards the drawing-room, implored him with her face to be silent. But he was annoyed and, shaking his head to indicate that the child could not hear, he went on in a husky undertone:

"You will probably hear some noise to-night. Don't be alarmed. It may pass off. That scene in the lodge did him a lot of harm . . . but he is having strong medicines and we shall see."

"Come, Monsieur Etienne, let us go on!" said Jeanne, loudly, in the drawing-room.

When the doctor had gone she made a suggestion. Etienne must sleep with Robert that night. . . . They had a very large bed. She would put clean sheets on it . . . and she would stay with Madame. She could sleep in an arm-chair and Madame on the sofa. Charlotte smiled faintly, but was full of gratitude. What a relief not to be alone that night.

Etienne seemed delighted at the prospect of his visit. He would sleep in a large bed with Monsieur Robert and all evening he would play with the parrot. A little later he went away with Jeanne, whistling and carrying his large album under his arm.

It was a night full of horror for the two women. Everything remained quiet until half-past one; then began once more Lourty's anxious ravings, and in the dead of night there was suddenly a dull thud and the sound of shuffling feet in a struggle—sometimes there was a groan, as if some one were overtaking his strength, or a cry of resistance or of rage from the patient.

Twice over the attendant came into the room, first to get some fresh water, and then to ask for some coffee for himself. In the glaring kitchen—everywhere the gas was blazing high as if much light could ward off the impending disaster—Jeanne was at work, shivering as if the night were frosty.

Madame Lourty during these hours reviewed all her past life in the fierce light of this terrible event, her trust in a better future, hoping always, in spite of everything, of much heartrending grief, the inner trivial happiness, much anxiety and many peace-giving cares, but the core of it rotten, long since, as if infected by an incurable disease and always behind it all the working of Fate. It seemed to her now a ghostly life, in the strange lucidity of this night-thought, with close beside her—tangible—this gruesome thing about Alphonse, who lay there struggling with insan-

ity—her husband Alphonse, who had been everything to her, and to whom she knew that she was just now an incident, one incident among the many incidents of his poor sick imagination.

She lay wide-awake and tossed on the sofa, while Jeanne, still fully dressed, watched each of her movements, every now and then turning a pillow or pulling up a slipping blanket.

The following morning, very early, Dr. Besnard came: he brought with him another attendant, an older man, with a determined and kindly face. They heard the night attendant leaving the house very quietly.

When the doctor came out of the sick-room, the sleepy swollen face with its bleary eyes looked smugly cheerful. He sat down with a sigh and rubbed his hands.

"Things are not going badly at all," he said; "the condition is better, he is beginning to get calmer."

"But is it necessary now, those strange men? . . . Can I not nurse him? Can I not help?" Madame Lourty implored.

"My dear lady," said the doctor, smiling as if the artlessness of the question amused him, and he took hold of her two pale hands in a free-and-easy pitying fashion. At the same time there was a scream from the sick-room. The doctor, with a violent start, pushed the little woman to one side and hurried away. The bedroom door was shut again. . . . From behind it came a horrible groan and muffled reproaches; above it, much nervous activity, tinkling of china and splashing of water.

In the middle of the hall stood Madame Lourty. Her head felt frozen inside as if at last there was going to be an end of her thinking and feeling.

"Jeanne," she cried. The word re-echoed throughout her brain, as if her skull would burst.

Jeanne had gone home an hour ago, to look after Etienne. There was no one.

Then she covered her face with her hands and tottered into the dining-room.

After a quarter of an hour the doctor came back. His face was grey, and he seemed thoroughly upset. On one of his cuffs Madame Lourty noticed a spot of blood.

The doctor motioned her not to ask questions.

"Everything is going well, everything is going well," he said nervously. Then very abruptly he inquired: "Have you any relations, male relations, his or your own?" He demanded the address, and said he would telegraph himself. Some one ought to come.

"Suicide," whispered Madame Lourty, almost inaudibly. Her eyes paled.

"No, no, no, no!" Besnard snarled reluctantly. "I will come back in half an hour."

At the open front door he turned round.

"Don't worry. It's nothing—just a little nose-bleeding. Keep calm . . . keep calm!"

Half an hour later, instead of a doctor, a second keeper appeared. He took up his position in a chair near to the bedroom door. He wore a peculiar kind of blue cloth shirt, and sat there like a policeman. Madame Lourty, with a shudder, locked herself in the dining-room, and lingered by the empty cage, as Etienne had done the day before. Her mind was a blank: she ran her fingers along the humming bars.

When, after a long time, she heard the new attendant going inside and the morning one come out to look for something in the kitchen, she got up in order to help him. She felt as if her face and limbs belonged to some one else. In a cold calm voice she heard herself say the incredible, unutterable:

"Were you there when Monsieur Lourty tried to take his life? Is he dangerously wounded?"

The man with the gentle face looked at her, astonished and rather suspicious; then, thinking that, after all, the doctor must have spoken, he said:

"No, not dangerous, if only we can keep him from tearing off the bandage."

And suddenly, taking fright at her little terrified face, he darted back into the sick-room with a confused good-bye.

Madame Lourty sat down again beside the bird's-cage. And Jeanne found her like this. It was nearly nine o'clock when she came. She had taken Etienne to school, she said, and Madame Dutoit was expecting him at twelve o'clock. Madame Dutoit and Monsieur Herz would be very kind to him. They were exceedingly sorry for her. Monsieur Etienne could have his dinner with them, and they would send him back to school. "And to-night . . ." said Jeanne tentatively.

"Oh, the night, the night," the little woman moaned; "yes, thank you, Jeanne."

Jeanne went on to talk about food and something to eat for the two men.

"Yes, all right, yes . . ." said the little woman, without even listening.

That same afternoon Henri Lourty arrived from Orléans, a dark, somewhat frigid man, serious, and in no way like Alphonse. He was much older.

"Save him, Henri, save him!" the little woman stammered in an agitation which was painful to behold.

He was very kind, and treated her in a sensible fatherly manner, but he had not much time to give to her. After he had been told that Etienne was being looked after during the day and the coming night, he went out immediately.

He wanted to see the doctor about consulting a specialist. He asked her if he could come and dine in the evening.

"Dine?" she asked stupidly. She herself had not touched a morsel of food since the previous evening.

He scrutinized her carefully and shook his head.

"What about Alphonse and the attendants?" he inquired.

"Alphonse only drinks milk which the attendant heats for him."

"And the attendant himself?"

She had not thought of it. Perhaps Jeanne had seen to that. "Enfin," said Lourty. He was in a hurry to catch the doctor and departed.

The arrival of her brother-in-law and the certainty of some assistance had given her a little strength. It seemed to her as if she were emerging from a world of feverish dreams, and suddenly felt the solid earth beneath her, recognizing a few familiar objects. She went into the kitchen to see if there were anything she could do. On the table there was a basket with empty dishes and forks. She thought they must belong to the men. She ate a piece of bread and a morsel of Gruyère.

When Jeanne came back at three o'clock from Madame Dutoit's she said that she had ordered three dinners. The attendant, who was sitting outside the door, had evidently taken it in.

"We had agreed to do it that way, hadn't we?" said Jeanne.

"I don't know," the little woman answered.

"But has Madame not eaten anything then?" Jeanne inquired, quite shocked.

"Some bread and cheese," she said, "a few minutes ago."

Jeanne hurried downstairs to buy eggs and butter in the dairy.

"What a business for the Carpentiers, having a lunatic in the house," said the dairywoman.

Jeanne hurried out of the shop and up the stairs. In a very short time she had prepared a delicious omelet, which, with gentle insistence, she forced the little woman to eat: she also poured her out a glass of wine.

"Jeanne," said Madame Lourty, "you are the soul of goodness to me; without you I should . . ."

She started violently at the word which came to her lips; she grew a deathly white. Feeling faint, she passed her hand across her eyes; then, weeping passionately, she leant against Jeanne's arm.

When she was a little calmer, Jeanne began, in a sweet soothing voice, to tell her about Etienne at Madame Dutoit's. She had always found Madame Dutoit rather standoffish, and had been afraid of her, but Madame Dutoit was so sweet to Monsieur Etienne.

Do you know what Monsieur Etienne is doing? He is sitting in the middle of her shop, on the floor, and is sticking labels on to boxes. Madame Dutoit has given him a sponge and a little jug of water, and now he is allowed to stick a label to each box. He is enjoying it so much that he begged to be let off school in case he could not finish it, he said. And do you know what I believe, said Jeanne in a whisper, as if the child might be able to hear her, do you know what I believe? That those labels were not necessary at all, but that Madame made it up to give him something to do. Would you ever have thought that such a thing would amuse Monsieur Etienne? At each label which is nice and straight, he says: "That's just *it*," or "Here's a good one!" or "I am getting on," or "Hurrah!" and at each one which is a bit to one side, he whispers to himself: "Cruche," or "Bêta!" There was for the first time in many days the ghost of a smile on the little woman's face.

Then came for Madame Lourty the torment and the momentary flutter of a fast dying hope, the pitiless dark truth—brought about by the specialist's visit.

The three men crowding out the little hall, the whispering, the rustling of clothes, the thud of footsteps in the drawing-room, then the silence; the going into the sick-room, first Dr. Besnard and the keeper, then Dr. Besnard and the strange professor; and from inside, after the peace of the morning, the rumbling of growing anger and Alphonse's cries of resistance.

Henri Lourty came to her in the dining-room. The doctors were consulting in Etienne's small room, he told her; then he led her to the sofa in the drawing-room.

The two doctors came in quiet and mysterious, and settled themselves down for a talk; the professor suave and pleasant and very learned, cultured and calm, a distinguished saint; Dr. Besnard looking ill at ease and countrified in his morning coat, unapproachable and haughty, as if he were offended at this lack of confidence, and yet in spite of himself thoroughly at home, talking, agreeing with the professor, and yet secretly pleased at the silent compliment which had been paid to him. And while incredibly horrible in its dull monotony, the pitiful cries behind her continued, the little woman was forced to answer a number of questions relating to the most simple daily facts, and also with regard to the most intimate details of her married life. She sat in the middle of the sofa, rigid and straight, and with a face so cold as if there were no more life in her.

"But my husband may recover?" she asked at last, shivering. The professor indicated with a gesture the hopelessness of the case.

"Nothing is impossible, Madame," he said, politely comforting.

"Spare her," said Henri Lourty, coming out of the dining-room, softly to Besnard.

Besnard, shamefaced and jovial, then laid his hand across her shoulder, felt her pulse, and wrote out a prescription, a nerve tonic.

When Henri Lourty came back about seven o'clock, he looked worried and exhausted. Cautiously he told her the result of his exertions. The best thing would be for Alphonse to go to a good institution, where he would be well cared for . . . he felt sure she would agree. He had attended to all the formalities, and the sooner he was moved there the better.

"A lunatic asylum?" faltered the little woman.

Henri Lourty made a vague gesture of reluctant acquiescence; then he tried to persuade his sister-in-law to come and dine with him somewhere, but soon saw that it would not be possible.

"I shall look after Madame," said Jeanne.

She came upstairs with a dish of apples and veal cutlets, which she had stewed in Madame Dutoit's oven. Etienne was having his supper there, she said, and Robert would call for him at bedtime. And again, on that second night, Jeanne sat up with Madame Lourty.

Early the next morning Alphonse was moved to the institution named "Sainte-Anne." The doctor had given orders that no one should see him. He was in a state of temporary stupor, from which he must on no account be roused. Henri Lourty sat with Charlotte in the sitting-room. He talked to her calmly and with great decision about Etienne.

"You must both come to us, of course," he said, "but perhaps you have one or two things to arrange in the house. How would it do for me to take Etienne to Orléans now?"

A door, which some one was trying to open quietly, creaked a little, slow footsteps moved in the hall; a voice whispered.

"Alphonse! Alphonse!" the little woman shrieked, suddenly beside herself. She jumped up, pulled open the room door, and before Henri Lourty could prevent her, she was standing in the open doorway.

Heavily, as if half-conscious, a man's form hung between two others, a pale and drawn face looked dreamily to one side, then straight ahead again; the left coat sleeve was half off and cut open, and the wrist, thickly bandaged, rested against the body.

A few more cautious stumbling footsteps, then the front door closed behind the melancholy group.

"Right! Forward!" Dr. Besnard's voice could be heard outside.

Her head swam; she groped about and sat down on a chair by the door; she felt as if warm waves were surging round her . . . then she knew nothing more.

II

That afternoon Henri Lourty had another interview with his sister-in-law.

"Andrée will be delighted to have you both," he said again.

Charlotte shook her head gently but very determinedly. She wanted to stay in Paris. She knew quite well that she would not be able to do anything for Alphonse, that she would not be allowed to see him, yet she wanted to stay in Paris.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said her brother-in-law thoughtfully. It would be better for her to be in different surroundings for a time, but of course he could see her difficulties, and speaking very formally and in a businesslike manner, he explained things to her. Alphonse must be nursed in a suitable way. All the same she herself must be able to live with the child. . . .

"But if Alphonse should come back, Henri?" the little woman asked desperately. "The professor said . . ."

"Even though he does get better," her brother-in-law answered out of the kindness of his heart, entering into an illusion which she had evidently not given up, "he will be out of employment for the time being. And this apartment. . . . You said yesterday that you would try and find work," he added nervously, "perhaps that would be best . . ."

He would be appointed Etienne's guardian, and as such he promised to be responsible for his schooling and clothes; he would also take upon himself the expenses for the last few days, the nursing and doctor's bills. But he would leave her to decide about the spending of the pension.

"Don't bother, don't bother," said the little woman, "I shall manage. Alphonse must be well cared for . . . use what is necessary for him."

"I should very much like to do more for you, Charlotte," said Lourty, for a moment unbending and becoming confidential. "But you know what it is. Andrée is kind-hearted, but she has all her relatives at Orléans. . . . She is used to a certain style of living. I cannot do less for her."

"If you see that Alphonse is properly nursed, and if you do something for Etienne as well, you will be doing more than enough, Henri," said the little woman. "I still owe you a hundred francs since January," she added, with a vivid blush.

Henri Lourty stopped her going any further.

"How are you proposing to arrange your life with the child?" he said anxiously. "You will not be able to find a post just at once. Can you get on for a time?"

She nodded.

"You must try and get rid of this apartment as soon as possible," he advised her.

Then the little woman remembered that on the first terrible

afternoon, Etienne had come upstairs with a letter from the Carpentiers. She got up and looked for it. It was still on the sideboard behind the glasses, where Etienne had put it.

Henri Lourty tore open the envelope, and as he read the note he got white with indignation.

"No, no," he said, warding off his sister-in-law. "The man wrote that in his first burst of anger, when he thought his wife had been hurt. Don't read it."

Then he glanced at the paper and put it in his pocket.

"Perhaps you had better not come in contact again with these people," he said. "I shall give notice for the 15th April, Charlotte. Should that man or the owner trouble you about it, refer them to me. Just say 'We are acting upon the letter which my brother-in-law, the barrister in Orléans, has in his keeping.'"

Then he asked again: "Can you live for the first few weeks, Charlotte?"

She nodded once more.

"After that we shall see," he said. "Up till May I shall be busy every hour of the day. I am too busy—too busy. . . . But," as if a sudden suspicion entered his mind, "perhaps Etienne's school fees are due, or something else. At any rate, I will leave you a hundred francs for the child."

She thanked him shyly, touched by the delicate tact.

Then it was time for his train.

All at once she realized very clearly that this man beside her, whom she knew so little, was Alphonse's brother, Alphonse's only brother, and the one being upon whom Etienne and she could now rely. She placed both her hands on his shoulders, raised her face, and kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you, Henri," she said, "thank you."

The following morning Madame Lourty called Jeanne into the room beside her.

"Jeanne," she said, "I am now so poor that I could not

even pay you for an hour's work, but you have been more than a friend to me these last few days and more than a sister. . . . I will accept it gladly if you will continue to come."

Jeanne's face was suffused with a soft glow of love and gratitude.

"I want to take you entirely into my confidence," said the little woman, "but you must promise me one thing first. You must never again do what you did in January; perhaps I might have to remain in your debt, and that cannot be. Promise that first."

Jeanne, much embarrassed, tried to evade answering, but the other woman urged her so emphatically that she gave her promise.

Then Madame Lourty told her all that had been arranged between herself and her brother-in-law on the previous afternoon.

"And can Madame live?" Jeanne inquired.

"No," said the little woman. "I could not accept any more money from him," she excused herself. "He earns a lot, but they keep up a good deal of style; he works harder than his strength permits. He will soon grow old. He has given me a hundred francs for Etienne," she added. "I would like to account for this later as having been spent on Etienne. I was calculating last night, when all the most urgent things have been paid, there will be six francs left." Jeanne was shocked. During all the years of her marriage life she had always had more than six francs at her disposal.

Then the fact that Madame had made such a confession to her, the servant, overwhelmed her with its magnitude and its painful joy.

Madame Lourty laid a comforting hand on Jeanne's arm.

"Never mind, Jeanne," she said. "You will help me. I shall be all right. It is much worse for my poor husband . . . and for Etienne," she added pathetically.

She had already evolved a plan. As soon as possible she would try and rent two cheap rooms. She possessed some gold and silver trinkets which she could sell, but would prefer to pawn. This would be the most difficult thing to do. Could Jeanne help her in this? The proceeds would probably enable her to live for a few weeks. On April 1 she would receive Monsieur's salary for part of the month, and then she might try and find some work.

"Work! Madame to work!" cried Jeanne. "What sort of work could Madame do?"

"Yes, Jeanne, you must help me to find something," the other woman said philosophically. "I shall take what I can get. I have always lived for Monsieur. Now I must do the same for Etienne."

"Oh!" thought Jeanne. "How could I ever have been disappointed last January in Madame Lourty's pluck?" Never had she seen any one with so much strength combined with such great love. That afternoon, just before dinner, Carpentier came upstairs; his face was very flushed, which was always the case when he was making special efforts to be friendly.

Monsieur Lourty from Orléans had twice come over to the loge, had expressed his concern about what had happened to Madame Carpentier and had given him twenty francs "because my brother has probably caused a certain amount of trouble in the house." Hortense and he were very much flattered with his treatment, and the fact that their Lourtys possessed a near relative who was a rich barrister at Orléans threw upon them a new light.

Hortense had told herself that all this time she had felt a greater pity for the little woman than she liked to say, and Emile owned to the same feelings.

"The danger for the house is past," she said; "the payment of the rent is guaranteed; her brother is sure to help her, she can stay."

Every morning Jeanne brought news about apartments which she had been to see the day before.

"Jeanne," said Madame Lourty on the fifth day, "you think nothing is good enough for me. I shall have to go and hunt myself."

Very quietly the days dragged by. The rooms were empty and deserted. When Etienne was at home, she forced herself to make things comfortable. Whenever she let herself go for a moment, her cheerfulness grew into a sad protecting pity which made the boy very silent. He was clearly much impressed by the change in the house, was obedient and docile, but he had never asked a single question, and no one knew how much he had taken in of what had happened.

Twice Madame Lourty received a notice from Ste. Anne. She was told in official terms that the patient's condition remained stationary, and that there was no cause for particular anxiety or special treatment. The second time, she was told to send a number of garments, all described in minutest details. When the bag was packed and sent off, the rooms looked still more lonely and unattractive on account of all the empty corners and open spaces which she knew in the cupboards and drawers.

The man who called for the things was the attendant who had sat up with Alphonse that first night. She pretended not to recognize him.

Then, on the sixth day, she was told that her husband had asked for the photos which he had collected on his travels, and for his collection of portraits of great men.

The first direct sign of life from Alphonse was a great joy to her.

"Supposing he got better . . . supposing that after all he got better . . . in those quiet surroundings. . . ." With a heart full of hope, she started to pack the two boxes. But when she had packed them, she suddenly thought she saw

through the covert hint in the words "great men"; there were among the collection many women, queens, courtesans, "merveilleuses of the eighteenth century, famous women of the Empire and the Directoire in low-necked dresses. She took off the paper again and sorted them out, all those lovely faces. She wondered whether Alphonse could have had secret sensations for those unyielding paper beauties and their full cheeks and rounded swan necks and swelling bosoms. She had never thought of that. With a sudden sense of distaste, the pictures and photographs slipped through her fingers. In the afternoon she took the parcel herself, but she was not allowed to come in. Patient 571 was a little restless that day, she heard some one in the hall say to the person who interviewed her in the waiting-room. She walked home, feeling as if she were living in a night mare. 571! For days on end she was troubled with this new thing she had learned. It was as if this number was burned into a dark corner of her head, this number which was Alphonse.

That afternoon Jeanne put in a hurried appearance at No. 118. She had found a couple of suitable rooms in the Rue Méchain, near to Ste. Anne's, near Etienne's school, and last but not least, near the Rue St. Jacques, two cheerful sunny rooms they were, looking out on to a cool convent garden.

But in the hall Gabrielle told her that she had seen Madame Lourty go out not more than ten minutes ago, and take the tram to Batignolles. Jeanne was very sorry, as the landlord was in a hurry for a decision.

"Ma chère," said Gabrielle, "I never see you nowadays. Come downstairs, come and see . . ."

Jeanne went upstairs to see for herself whether Madame Lourty had really gone out, then went down into the basement.

The room looked like a draper's shop. Madame Leguënné was departing in twelve days.

With an ecstatic expression on her gaunt face she took stock of her purchases every now and again, touching with her slim emaciated fingers either a bit of transparent white stuff, a handkerchief covered with pale-blue flowers, or the lace frill of under-garments, decorated with lavender silk bows. She glanced towards the far-away corner of the room, then looked at Jeanne and laughed her self-pitying suppressed laugh.

"It is very pretty," said Jeanne, "but do you require all that?"

"Oh, si, si!" whispered Gabrielle. Eagerly she showed her, besides the white lawn things, two dressing-jackets of cobwebby multi-coloured lawn, soft raspberry reds and pale greens and lilacs, all intermingling. With modestly down-cast eyes she held the material to her sallow face, and it was pitiful to behold, but when she looked up and her whole face was illuminated by the wonderful light of her fervently glowing eyes, she was almost beautiful.

"I hope," said Jeanne, a little sadly, "that you will enjoy yourself over there."

Gabrielle laughed, laughed with ambiguous gaiety.

"And here is the mosquito-net," she said.

It was a stout bundle containing dozens of yards of material. Gabriel had tied a pink ribbon round it with a bow, shaped like two hearts. She let Jeanne finger it and feel its weight in her hand.

"Heavy," she said, "one mosquito net for twin beds."

Then she told an elaborate tale about how you had to creep through a narrow opening, and that, in the tropics, you slept with hardly anything on at all. . . . Jeanne was lost in admiration for a white linen skirt, upon which Gabrielle herself had embroidered a border of buds and leaves. And in the end, she was in fits of laughter when Gabrielle took off her shoes and stockings and tripped about the room in claret-coloured slippers.

When Jeanne went to the Rue Méchain the next day, the rooms had been let.

"Perhaps it is all for the best, Jeanne," said Madame Lourty. "Perhaps I had better not take rooms until I know if I can find work, and where."

She had answered a variety of advertisements. She had offered her services as inspectress at a blouse-making establishment, as secretary at a jeweller's, and as the lady-in-charge of the linen cupboards at a hotel. She had been to a Labour Exchange in the Rue Pierre Charron. But all this without any result. The only thing which she had been able to find was a situation as housekeeper to people who were always in their shop, but she did not want to live with them and find a home elsewhere for Etienne, so she could not accept it.

After the apartment had been "to let" for about ten days, Madame Carpentier came upstairs one day and asked most affably for permission to show a lady and gentleman—who were, incidentally, just behind her—the flat. The three came in. Madame Lourty sat down again at the dining-room table, where she was busy folding linen. Once or twice she glanced at the strangers who would perhaps live in the rooms belonging to Alphonse and her, and who, behind Madame Carpentier, were pushing their way through the narrow entrance-hall to the kitchen, the bedroom, and the drawing-room, and then, looking through the dividing door, appeared to be astonished at finding themselves once more in the dining-room. The woman, a countrified, somewhat bucolic lady in mourning, moved round most carefully, but the man, blushing with embarrassment, looked over her shoulder and approved of everything. Every now and then Madame Carpentier, in a confidential aside, tried to draw Madame Lourty into the conversation. How many years had Madame lived there? Well, she hoped that the new tenants would stay just as long as Madame had. "Ma-

dame here has always been very satisfied with the apartment, I know that." Nothing was lacking. The dining-room not too big, but just right; small drawing-room, room looking out on to the garden, a small room for visitors or to be used as a boudoir, plenty of cupboard accommodation. "Look here. May I, Madame Lourty?" she said jovially, round the corner of the door. She was most genial, the nice comfortable concierge on the best of terms with her tenants, and as a matter of fact she was quite sincere. But Madame Lourty remained unresponsive, replying occasionally in a coldly civil voice or nodding her head in silent acquiescence.

Suddenly, when they were all back in the hall, Madame Lourty got a fright when she caught sight of the man's bright blue eyes in a red face, gazing at her across the woman's shoulder, but then she noticed the stupid smiling mouth and heard the good-natured voice.

"Oh, that is not possible," snapped his wife; "that large cupboard cannot stand anywhere else."

"But supposing you put the bed the other way round," suggested Madame Carpentier; "just because this bed happens to be placed in that way . . ."

Madame Lourty got up and closed her dining-room door. She could not listen to their talk any longer.

Two days later Madame Lourty possessed exactly ten francs of the sixty which she had received for her pawned brooch and watch. The last payment of her husband's salary was not due for many days. She thought of getting in some one from a second-hand furniture shop, but Jeanne objected to this most strongly.

Then, on the afternoon of March 29, a fortnight after Alphonse had been taken to Ste. Anne's, there was a long letter from Madame Lourty's two old friends in Boulogne, to whom she had only recently made known the latest tragic developments of her life.

These two women, also natives of Geneva, had been for many years at the head of a flourishing girls' boarding school. Madame Lourty had never thought of this school as a possible solution of her difficulties. She knew it to be thoroughly well staffed, and also that even though there might be a vacancy, she would never have the qualifications to fill it. And now they wrote: "Come to us, Charlotte, while Alphonse is ill. You are exactly the person we need. You have not got any diplomas, but for a long time we have been looking for a refined young woman who would take charge of our older girls who only take a few finishing lessons, and to do administrative work. We ourselves are getting old, the busy life often tires us; we require some help. You can be entirely independent. Come from nine to four, your boy's school hours, to us. Etienne can have his midday meal with us. Live by yourselves the rest of the time. We can give you eighteen hundred francs a year."

"Jeanne," said Madame Lourty, "a miracle has happened." After she had read the letter to her, Jeanne's eyes glistened with tears. At first she did not say anything.

"I am so glad, I am so glad, Madame," she then said in a broken voice, and suddenly began to weep, but she did not want to do that, and laughed and cried in turns. Then, with an effort of will, she dried her tears, her face radiant with joy.

"Every morning at five o'clock I have prayed for you in St. Jacques du Haut-Pas. I have prayed so hard! I had such faith that a way would be found, but it did not come. Eighteen hundred francs!" she said, elated; then she made a rapid mental calculation: "Two lunches for nothing, a couple of rooms in Boulogne. Etienne's school fees and clothes paid for. Oh, Madame can live well now, without a care!" She was as if drunk with happiness. She could have shouted with her crazy joy. All at once she went to

the sideboard and poured herself out a large glass of wine, which she emptied at a gulp. The wine had been uncorked a fortnight ago and was acid, but the sharp bitter taste on her tongue did not worry her.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," Madame Lourty warned gently; then Jeanne calmed down immediately and excused herself with a shamed face.

But the next moment she flew into raptures again.

She snatched hold of a racket belonging to Etienne and was seized with a wild impulse to beat it in the air. Then her eyes were held by Madame Lourty's, and her gladness subsided into a sense of peaceful happiness and she went away. A quarter of an hour later she came back again. In the hall she had met Gabrielle, who lured her back to the basement, in order to let her admire her latest purchase, an elegant wide-brimmed topee made of silky linen, white on the outside and pale green inside . . . green to shade the eyes in the burning sun! . . . and light as a feather. . . . Round the crown was a veil of green tulle. Jeanne was delighted with it, and held the hat in her hand.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Gabrielle said, but Jeanne did not answer; for some reason she was overcome with a violent desire to go and show the hat to Madame Lourty.

"May I let Madame have a look at it upstairs?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course!" said Gabrielle, very much astonished and flattered.

Then she begged her to be very careful. The hat had cost twenty-eight francs!

A little later, her small red fist clenched inside the crown of the hat, which hovered above it like an exotic white and green bird, her other little hand protecting it carefully, and above this her flushed child's face with its wide laughing mouth and quivering nostrils, she stood beside Madame Lourty.

"What is that, Jeanne?" inquired the little woman, a trifle surprised; then all at once she understood this sudden exuberance of spirits. She admired the hat as she would have done if a happy child had shown it to her.

Jeanne only stayed for a moment. With airy footsteps, as if she were dancing for joy, she swayed the hat on her hand, and went downstairs to Madame Dutoit.

"In four days Madame Leguënné is going to the Sénégal," she babbled. "She has bought a trousseau for the tropics, and a mosquito net . . . and this is her hat."

Like a huge and trembling seabird the white and green object rested on her taut wrist. She moved the hat gently from right to left, full of solicitude lest it would fall, and in her eyes was a vague look, as if far away on the horizon she saw a vision of the most wonderful beauty. . . .

And so she stood in the middle of Madame Dutoit's shop.

A steady beaming smile seemed to pervade her whole being.

"I thought, Jeanne," said Madame Dutoit, who was eyeing the hat inquisitively, "that you were not pleased with the idea of Madame Leguënné's travels. . . . Have you changed your mind?"

"Oh yes!" said Jeanne airily, as if neither the question nor the answer had made any impression on her. Once more, holding the hat in both hands now, she showed it off, first outside and then inside. After that she passed on.

She tapped at the door of Dr. Valency's study.

"Come in," he cried.

She stood beside the large ebony bureau with the all-pervading rapturous smile, but her eyes were tired now and curiously sunken with a deep-set glow and upward slant.

"What have you got there, Madame Chrysanthème?" said Dr. Valency, casting an astonished glance at the wonderful headgear, which had suddenly come fluttering into his quiet study.

Jeanne, with the voice of a child who is exhausted after too many excitements, once more told her naïve tale.

"In four days Madame Leguënné is going to the Sénégal. She has bought a lovely trousseau for the tropics, and a mosquito net . . . and this is her hat."

And then, still walking airily and with dancing footsteps, but a little calmer now she had worked off some of her exuberance of spirits, she took back the festive hat to Gabrielle.

CHAPTER 18

I

IT was the fourteenth of April.

Across the fresh dewy morning street, bathed in sunshine and shade and full of the scents of spring, Célestin came, wheeling his cart with furniture in the direction of No. 118. He himself, wearing his velvet suit and his soft hat, was between the shafts. A pale overgrown boy, son of the people, who owned his attic, was harnessed in front. He pulled with all his might, bent double like a bargeman's mate holding the rope, for he was fond of Célestin and wished to do his best to help.

"Gently, gently, Gustave!" Célestin shouted. The iron bedstead, with its four feet in the air, lay across the chest of drawers; the chairs and the various parts of the trestle, built up into a huge ingenious edifice, towered on the top of this, almost capsizing at each bump of the cart. Like a massive row of white paper organ-pipes, the innumerable rolls of drawing surrounded the bed, and in the fuel chest a lamp and a bronze statue could be discerned.

"They are off to the foire de Pantin!" cried a young fellow, walking along the pavement, to a departing friend.

"Removing the Eiffel Tower!" the other one shouted back.

Two women, at a fish barrow, laughed immoderately.

Célestin, wheeling his cart and very intent on his belongings, was unexpectedly moved as he caught sight of the white and cream-coloured house-front of No. 118.

He was suddenly very conscious of the astonishing fact that he was now going to live in the room which had belonged to Aristide—the same room . . . Jozette's room! . . .

Almost untouched by the winter rains, the house rose shiny and new in its last year's coat of paint, a bright spot between the dinginess of the neighbouring blocks of houses. At this early hour in the morning all the white shutters of No. 118 were already fastened back on either side of the windows—it looked an active and an industrious house; on one side of the wide-open front door shone the dull gold name-plate of the hat-shop.

Coming closer, Célestin distinguished, behind the balcony rail on the roof, the delicate shades of some early flowers, which had been put out in the warm spring sunshine.

How long ago seemed the days when from this point in the street he used to look for the pink and white glimmer of a girl's frock behind the iron bars.

Once more Célestin scanned the high wide façade. . . . It was odd . . . so odd to think that very soon he would live there, high above that swarm of human lives, high up in the little boxlike room, in which for so long had existed all the hopes and fears of his life. As in a vivid and far-away vision, he saw the house open and exposed, a confusion of strange beings in rooms and halls, and above all that, alone in a small room, silent and solitary, he, Célestin. . . .

"Gently, gently, Gustave!" he cried to the boy, who gave a sudden jerk, which caused the shafts to jump from his careless hands.

Then they stopped at No. 118.

The inquisitive Madame Carpentier came strolling outside, and with a cursory glance she mustered the load of furniture, and then gave vent to one of her rather coarse jokes.

"One month's credit, Monsieur Boulard, no longer!"

Célestin, however sad he might feel at heart, did not lose

his head. Laughing a little nervously, he indicated his drawings and said: "And that? and that?"

Then the boy and he undid the ropes and unloaded the things. "I had expected you sooner," said the concierge. "Monsieur Baroche left more than a week ago for his studio in the Rue Falguière, the same day as Madame Leguënné went to the Sénégal. . . . You remember her, don't you?"

Célestin, with a workman-like sigh, took part of the trestle on his back. He toiled with exaggerated energy, his deep bass voice echoing noisily across the street and hall.

"Here, Gustave! . . . quick, Gustave! . . . to the left . . . to the left . . . like this . . . ah fichtre! . . . enfin . . . that's it! . . .

When Célestin arrived upstairs with his first load, it was as if his feet refused to cross the threshold of the little room.

Looking sadly faded in the sharp morning light, the turquoise-blue curtain, which Aristide had not thought worth taking, hung in folds against the corner, and the bare discoloured wall opposite the window was surrounded by uncertain half-faded stripes, the bright blue-grey space where the large painting had been—a wide gaping wound. He turned away abruptly and hurried down again.

The boy and he worked for an hour, dragging the heavy pieces up the stairs; then, like two good comrades, they went and drank a glass of wine at the neighbouring *charbonnier*, who kept an inn.

With an air of utter depression, as if there were no pleasure left in life, the boy took his leave; slipping the two francs which Célestin gave him carelessly into his trouser pocket, he got into harness again, and dawdled out of the street with his empty cart. Célestin, still more dejected, toiled up the stairs and set to work with feverish zeal at arranging his things.

That evening Célestin sat down with his reading-lamp be-

side him at the trestle-table and his work all ready, but he did not start. Resting his head on his hands, he gazed about him and could not keep his miserable thoughts in check. His room looked quite cosy, the bed half-hidden by the turquoise curtain, the chest of drawers where the couch had been, and on the mantelpiece his bronze bust of Dante; on either side of the mirror were photographs from the Louvre, and behind him, above the chest of drawers, a number of his own sketches, but behind that bright-coloured, white-bordered patch he knew that there was an ineradicable dark shadow. His head was full of a smarting melancholy, which could have made him weep like a child, had his pride allowed it.

He was not in a state of desperation as he was on that horrible evening when Jozette had suddenly disappeared and when he had wandered about Paris, half mad, neither did he feel the poignant torture of that other evening when for the first and only time, among the gaudy throng of *cocottes* at the Caves de l'Olympia, he saw her again. . . . This evening his suffering was less, and at the same time, worse, more irrevocable and more cruelly defined, yet there stole over him a sense of resignation. "You are still searching for Baroche's former sweetheart," a studio friend had said to him once. . . . "Go and have a look in the Olympia after twelve at night, downstairs."

He had waited for three evenings; he did not dare. . . . This was even more horrible than the going to the Morgue, whither he had always felt driven during the first few days after she had disappeared, and yet he had never dared to enter it. . . . This, although he tried to persuade himself that it was a mistake, this, he knew only too well, was true; at last, on the fourth evening he went, and as soon as he came into the low sensuously scented hall, he recognized her, and knew. . . . He saw her pallid face, haughty and defi-

ant, cool, and at the same time almost fierce, with the enigmatical glint in her eyes which he knew so well, but with a new cold laugh about her sharp hot painted lips. . . .

Like a lunatic Célestin rushed out into the street. For days he had gone about like one possessed, with this apparition of Jozette, who was no longer Jozette; he saw always that cold laugh, and the tragic glint of those eyes. . . .

Then, by degrees, all this had faded; it had not become any less gruesome, but more unreal, a bad dream. He could think again of Jozette as he had known her for a whole year—with, buried in his heart, this still gnawing indestructible night-vision.

Here, in his little well-known room, where he had seen Jozette's daily life, he could feel again how much he had loved her! Before him on the table lay the shiny black miniature notebook which she always kept in a corner of the window-seat. Aristide had forgotten to take it.

With a tiny pencil she had noted in it, in her cramped backward handwriting, all the small household expenses, and trifles which she had wished to remember. There were things here which were touching in their childishness. "Water the flowers," "Water the flowers," he read on several successive pages. He remembered how angry Aristide had been once, when, owing to her neglect, some nasturtiums in a vase on the mantelpiece had withered. "White strawberries," she had on another page: she had no doubt meant to buy them; he reflected how even as a boy Aristide had been very partial to this particular kind of fruit. "*Chou-fleur au gratin*" he read again—this was one of Aristide's favourite dishes . . . and then he came to a page across which she had written as well as she could in slender artistic letters "Aristide," and then again "Aristi," "Aristide," and a page farther on, "Baroche," "Baroche," and on the sheet marked September 9, in a wild scrawl: "Come back, Bibi,

oh! come back quickly, I cannot do without you, I love you, oh! I love you!" There was also a hurried sketch of a man's profile, with a very large eye in it, and underneath it a rhyme:

"N'est-il pas joli,
Mon petit Bibi?
N'est-il pas splendide,
Mon Aristide?"

And then followed "buy cigarettes." . . . Aristide . . . always Aristide. . . .

Célestin thought of him, but without any bitterness. Aristide's dearest wish had come true; he had a real studio among a row of other studios, he lived among artists only . . . and at the new term was going over to the Beaux Arts . . . the authorities in Roubaix had been won over to his changed ideas and there was no doubt that he would pass his entrance exam . . . he knew, from various acquaintances, that Aristide had received another order from some one in the Avenue de Friedland, a friend of the German baroness; Aristide had mentioned it himself the last time he saw him—an accidental meeting in the Place de l'Observatoire, on which occasion he had been fired with sudden enthusiasm and had gone straight off to take Jozette's old room. . . .

Now, in his quiet evening hour, he understood so clearly Aristide's character—Aristide, so much quicker than he, and with such fine perceptions too—everything came to him so easily; and he was very adaptable. . . . Aristide would go far, he could get wherever he liked, Aristide would be a famous Parisian.

Then, his heart still very heavy, and with a vague sense of distaste, Célestin said aloud: "A famous Parisian"—Yes, Aristide would be all that . . . everything pointed

towards it . . . but a great artist he would never be . . . there was something lacking in Aristide's mind, perhaps still more, something lacking in his character.

"No," Célestin mused, "Aristide will never be a great artist." . . . He thought of Jozette's departure. . . . To be really great you must be a more complete human being than he . . . with big, perhaps even very big faults, but more completely human. And he himself? . . . Mon Dieu! he himself . . . he would be a good workman . . . a swatter, not without talent . . . a designer at one of the large weaving-mills at Roubaix . . . or somewhere else . . . perhaps he would stay in Paris . . . but most probably he would go back to Roubaix. . . . If he worked hard, he could accomplish that. . . . Everything that evening was so strangely—so fearfully clear to him . . . he pictured himself going through life, a sober, modest, little man, a trifle noisy on the surface . . . and later on, he would be no different from any one else. He would marry some nice girl . . . he would be fond of her, too. . . .

But he saw into the future and felt it so plainly; there would be dreams, in vague far-away nights, strangely, agonizing sweet, from which he would awaken with that old gnawing pain . . . there would be occasional unexpected moments during the days . . . there would always be that tender spot in his heart . . . Jozette . . . Jozette. . . .

Then, all at once, he recalled the words which the little pale-faced wife of the *érotomane* had said to him concerning Aristide: "If one enters into relationships such as your friend. . . ."

And that was, perhaps, the wonderful thought which came into his mind during all that long evening. Perhaps it was better that he had not married Jozette; the knowledge that a girl like Jozette would not have fitted into his middle-class life, that the dearest creature he knew in the world was yet a stranger to his innermost being.

Célestin saw the house at Roubaix, in which he had grown up, the roomy old verger's cottage in the shadow of St. Martin; his uncle, an old heavily built man, looking like a venerable priest in his long black verger's coat and his black silk skull-cap on his almost bald head, sat by the square-paned window with his newspaper—his old cousin Barbe was standing in the large red-brick kitchen beside the hearth; his Aunt Augustine, who was gouty, lay upstairs in her wide, white frilly bed, or she sat, her pale peaceful face still young-looking, in the deep chair by the other square-paned window and stitched at some fancy-work. . . . Yet more pictures came to him; in the depths of the Cathedral, his uncle walking slowly up and down the altar steps, lighting the tall candles with his long taper—he just bends his knee as he passes the sanctuary; behind the heavy draught door, in his oaken stall, sits his uncle, dreamily handling the holy water brush; on the bleaching field, beneath the shiny church walls, he walks, an old man, but rosy and erect, his black silk skull-cap set straight on his head, looking after his hens and his frames, or watering with a green watering-can the fuchias which grow at the open kitchen door, on the flagged path in which an old date is engraved. In this house, in those surroundings, the light shone most clearly, the scent was sweetest, the air most soothing to his head.

He saw Jozette now . . . she became even dearer to him as he saw her there . . . two images were always coming into his mind; under the flowering cherry tree on the lawn Jozette sitting in a low chair, mending something, which slipped through her small work-worn hands. . . .

Jozette in the open kitchen door on the well-scoured washing seat, her black slippers resting on a footstool and her apron bulging with peas, which she shells. . . . She looks up and outside; she thinks and smiles. . . .

Ah, how angelic she could have been there, in that old house . . . had it been possible! But he saw also the grief

of those old people, his uncle's stern attitude, his Aunt Augustine's silent sorrow . . . it would never have been possible for him to have married Jozette . . . but he knew it, with a complete renunciation of his innermost self, he would have married her, he would have married her with the greatest joy. . . .

He mused on the strangeness of life, oppressive, unaccountable, foolish, mad . . . here he was, sitting in their little old room; there was his old plush chair; there was his iron bed, peeping like a black skeleton from under the turquoise curtain. . . . Jozette! oh, Jozette! . . . he saw her wistful languor that evening when she drank to him: "Bouboule, to your new hat!" . . . he saw her laugh, that other evening in the Olympia . . . that cruel laugh of chilled despair and self-destruction.

And leaning forward on the trestle-table, Célestin sobbed like a little boy.

II

In the almost empty apartment on the fourth floor—the removers, who had come very early, were resting—Jeanne and Madame Lourty faced each other, full of depression.

"Come, Jeanne, come!" the little woman said in the end, outwardly calm—"on Sundays, you will come to see me, with your husband. . . . You will go to the Bois or to St. Cloud, and on your way back, you will come past Boulogne. . . ."

In the neighbourhood of her boarding-school she had succeeded in renting, in a two-storyed village house, two spacious cheerful rooms looking out on to the street.

"From out of one window you can see the first trees of the Bois, and from the other, the Seine," she managed to say quite cheerily. It was even harder than she had feared—this leaving of her home, where the last six years of her

married life, however sadly, had been spent. The bedroom was already clear . . . the square of yellow-papered walls yawned gloomily; a dark grey cobweb hung quivering to the spot where the wardrobe had been. . . . In the dining-room the sideboard alone projected into the dusty space, and the hall was full of straw and bits of packing-wool. Above the door the little Swiss clock ticked and sighed in turns.

Jeanne, to hide her emotion, bent and picked up a handful of straw, throwing it into a corner. . . .

"I am glad that Madame has been so fortunate, but I shall always go on missing Madame," she said huskily.

"I shall miss you too, Jeanne," said the little woman simply; and then with sweet concern: "but what about you . . . now that Madame Dutoit is going?"

"Oh, I," said Jeanne, "I shall find something else, either in this house or in another house, somewhere near. And besides . . . Madame Dutoit is not going until August. . . ."

There was another embarrassed silence.

"And will you thank Madame Dutoit once more for all her kindness to Etienne? I should have liked to do it myself, but I expect she will understand. . . ."

Then Madame Lourty walked into the untouched drawing-room and beckoned shyly to Jeanne.

Jeanne came in. She shuddered slightly: "Curious," she thought, "that everything is just as it used to be. . . ." She looked about her very moved, and as if she were seeing everything in a new light . . . a few cushions and covers and knick-knacks had been taken away and on the empty table beside the sofa was a half-burned candle and a medicine bottle. Everything seemed full of meaning to her.

"Jeanne," said Madame Lourty. . . . She had bought her a remembrance . . . a red leather photograph album

which concealed a musical box . . . for she knew that Jeanne adored music.

With a gesture of glad childish generosity in spite of all her sorrow, Madame Lourty handed it to Jeanne, waited for a moment, showed her how it worked.

The musical box played an air out of Mignon, and an air out of Carmen: as described on a white label, underneath the glass, behind which the little prickly gold roll rested against its steel teeth. . . . And in the first large page of the album there was a photograph of Etienne and his mother, when the child was six years old . . . three lines were written underneath it.

Jeanne was at first a little confused, and did not express much pleasure at this unexpected present. Then suddenly her face grew radiant with happiness: she had noticed the photo stuck into the page.

"Madame! Madame! Madame!" she said.

Her eyes were a deep black with joy, her wide nostrils quivered, her lips relaxed into a smile. . . .

The small hanging clock struck nine. Madame Lourty gave a little startled jump of warning; nine o'clock! it was the moment of parting.

"Adieu, Madame, adieu!" said Jeanne fiercely. She grasped Madame Lourty's hand, and kissed it repeatedly, with bowed head, in wild self-effacement.

But the little woman withdrew herself gently from this humble and passionate caress; she laid both hands on Jeanne's shoulders, looked long and deep into her glistening eyes and said: "Your kindness to me, Jeanne, will bring you happiness in the future."

Then she kissed her twice on the same cheek.

"Adieu, Madame, adieu," stammered Jeanne once again, and as if she were a fugitive she hurried downstairs, the uncovered album in her hand.

Madame Dutoit did not say a word when she came in. She was sorry for Madame Lourty, so that she left Jeanne, who seemed such a good creature, more or less to her own devices.

Jeanne, in her little kitchen, where for weeks past she had allowed the dust to thicken on the rubbish which was stored there, sat for a moment with the open album in her hands. She gazed at the picture, she stroked the sweet face— younger looking at that time—with her finger, very gently. . . . She would have liked to kiss it, if only she had not been afraid that the touch of her lips would soil it. . . . Very cautiously she rubbed a corner of her apron across the mark which her hot breath had made on the cardboard. . . . To go to Boulogne . . . on a Sunday—with Robert. This would remain a simple consolation for her. And all at once, as if she noticed it for the first time, she became aware of the three lines of writing under the photo. . . . What was it? For an instant she tried to satisfy herself with a vague sense of joy . . . Madame's writing . . . Madame *herself* had written these words. . . . She stroked them lovingly with her finger.

But then she was tortured with the feeling that she did not know what Madame had written here. And forgetting everything else in her violent desire, she ran to the shop with her open album.

"Madame," she said with an eagerness which had overcome all her timidity. "I cannot read this . . . what is written here?"

Madame Dutoit looked up in astonishment. It was the first time, after four years of a secret game of hide and seek, that Jeanne surrendered. The woman at her office desk, with her fresh ruddy face above her red silk blouse, could not prevent a pleasantly triumphant smile from creeping into her keen brown eyes. Then as she watched Jeanne, her face softened.

"Is this Madame Lourty?" she inquired.

And when Jeanne nodded, she added: "A sweet face."

Jeanne would never forget this remark and would always remain grateful to Madame Dutoit for having uttered it.

And somewhat surprised, as if she were asking an explanation of the words, Madame Dutoit read:

". . . a sister and a friend, and more than that. . . ."

With both trembling hands Jeanne drew the album from the fingers which held it, and speechless, slowly and with a sob of pure bliss, she left the shop for her kitchen.

When at eleven o'clock, she crept upstairs again, Madame Lourty had left. Just at that moment the concierge's wife appeared with the paperhanger who was to do the "redcoration" upon which the new tenants had insisted.

III

"Emile," said Madame Carpentier in great excitement as her husband came into the loge that afternoon: "Emile, Madame Dutoit is going away!"

"Fichtre de . . ." Carpentier stuck half-way in his exclamation—"Why? Why?" he inquired. But Hortense shrugged her shoulders in anger.

"Madame la baronne gave up her rooms when she paid the rent," she said acidly, and sinking into a chair by the table, she began to tell him, with many cantankerous gestures, in which her pent-up anger vented itself:

"No sooner had I swept up the hall after the Lourty removal, but she marches in . . . like this . . . her head well back . . . wearing that bright red blouse. . . . 'Madame Carpentier,' she says, 'this is the last time but one that I shall come to pay you my rent. . . .' I said at once 'all right. . . .' Her lame hip in the air, and her fist on her stick, she stands there (though sitting, Hortense imitated

her attitude) . . . and in the voice of a trooper . . . 'you can let the house for September . . . I am moving some time in August. . . .'

"Why? Why?" inquired Carpentier again.

Now thoroughly taken aback, his bad eyelid lay flat, dead against the blind pupil, as if it would never be raised again.

Hortense, impatient and irritable, mimicked him. . . . "Why? . . . She is going to start a shop in the Rue Drouot, a large shop, with plate-glass windows and a rent of two thousand francs . . . it is a wonder I was able to get that out of her."

"La canaille," said Carpentier.

"And Herz?" he asked immediately, still hoping against hope for some good news. "Well, what about Herz?" . . . snapped Hortense—"he is also going, I should imagine. . . ."

Irritated by Madame Dutoit's triumphant superiority, she had attacked her with one of her uncontrolled, insolent, so-called funny questions, hoping to confuse the other woman: "And Monsieur Herz?"

"If you are interested, I should advise you to go to Monsieur Herz himself and ask him about his plans," Madame Dutoit had answered tranquilly, with such a clear strong expression in her brown eyes that Hortense was forced to look away.

She flushed up again with annoyance at Emile's question.

"Yes," said Carpentier, depressed. "Herz will go with her of course. . . ." Sucking his bristly little moustache, he walked in a dejected manner to the mirrored wardrobe, to count the rents.

Monsieur Reuilly came early that afternoon. Carpentier's head was filled with complaints and difficulties and he was anxious; Madame Dutoit's notice worried him. But Reuilly appeared to be in a hurry; he looked a little sulky when Carpentier started his tale, but when he got to the bit

about the large shop in the Rue Drouot, he said abruptly: "Well, I am glad, at any rate, that Madame Dutoit is leaving for reasons which have nothing to do with this house. Put up the 'To Let' board at once, please. Let us hope that it will be taken just as quickly as the other two apartments."

. . . "Has no one come to inquire about the basement?" he said casually—the money was paid over in a moment, and at half-past two, Carpentier sat there at the loge window, with his free afternoon in front of him and filled with a sense of anticlimax. He was always left with this subdued feeling after each one of the owner's visits; never yet had he been able to pour out his difficulties and suggest his plans in the loquacious and luxuriant manner which he thought would meet the case. He considered Monsieur Reuilly rather too easy-going for a landlord. Perhaps it was because he felt that the management of the house could be left so very safely to Hortense and himself; nevertheless a little support from the owner would not have come amiss. . . . And fancy being sorry because that Dutoit woman was leaving. It looked like it, at any rate. . . . How could he say: "I am glad she is leaving of her own accord!" It was a wonder they were not blamed for her departure!

Feeling weary in this mild April weather, Carpentier sat at his open loge-window and rested, after the strain—the removal began, if you please, at six in the morning—and the general excitement of all this *grand terme*; Hortense was out. The scent of budding leaves and wallflowers was wafted in from the dark watered street. He was refreshed by this warm freshness and the afternoon silence in the apparently sleeping house.

With his square finger-tops, horny with the handling of leather, he rolled himself very patiently a number of cigarettes, laid them on the table before him, then leaning back in his chair, he puffed at one, gazing straight ahead.

"Leguënné . . . Lourty . . . Dutoit," he thought. He felt a trifle dissatisfied and bitter.

That lame creature Dutoit, who, like a grand lady, waived two months of her rent . . . he could not quite get over it. . . . All the same, he wanted her to go and she was going. They had, of course, always made it very clear to her that a woman in her position was not really in her place in a house like theirs. And that painter's girl also! . . .

At half-past three he bought a *Patrie* from a passing news-boy and lolling luxuriously in his deep plush chair, read the leading article. The author, he thought, had no style and was behind the times in his ideas. Then, a little sleepily, he gazed at a serial.

What a lot had changed in one year, during his reign . . . that girl . . . Dutoit . . . the Leguënnés gone . . . the Lourtys. He could still picture himself writing the note, on the afternoon that Hortense was assaulted.

What anxiety Lourty had caused him! He might not have stopped attacking people in their own apartments! Had Hortense not discovered him one fine morning in the act of going up the stairs to look up young Madame Giraud? And even Hortense, once when he himself had stayed out rather late one night—the light in the hall was burning, but Hortense had gone to bed—Lourty had stood tapping on the door for at least five minutes. Sometimes Lourty went out into the street after eleven o'clock! And when from the dark hall came that funny cough and that shamefaced "Cord, please," he had often felt inclined not to pull it! And lying wide awake in his warm bed he liked to picture what would have happened . . . how Lourty, mad with rage over his refusal, would have kicked at the loge-door, how he himself, his feet cut with glass, would lean out of the window and yell for help, cold in his nightshirt and struggling with Lourty, who in the meantime had climbed in and was assaulting his wife. He saw the red stain from his wounded

hands on the bedclothes—till at last, the policeman who always paced up and down the street at night, heard his shouts and his wife's ear-piercing shrieks and they arrested the madman. Then there would have been something more in the papers than that silly little notice in the *Patrie*, not even correct: A madman Place de l'Observatoire" a news item consisting of not more than five lines, in which their name was not even mentioned!

He saw the paper, with its large headline: "The tragedy of the Rue Barral," and underneath a little smaller, but penetrating into the very heart of the tragedy: "The heroism of a concierge." . . . A pity! they had got off too easily. . . . And Leguënné! . . . and Gabrielle with her lawsuit; Hortense and he had done their duty, they had tried to prevent her from going to the Sénégal, but when she insisted on going, so much the better; only she was very useful to them. Anyhow, there was now one rotten spot less. For Leguënné himself, who dragged you into drunken orgies, was not really in his right place in the house.

Four malignant growths removed . . . and yet! . . . With a slight tinkling of glass, the loge-window clicked open, the senator bent his broad red face into the opening and asked for his letters.

Carpentier rose helpfully and walking over to the bed, where on the lace coverlet the twelve o'clock post was arranged. . . . "Just a newspaper, Monsieur le Sénateur," he said humbly. With a bow and an unctuous smile, he handed the paper through the small opening in the glass.

The senator muttered his thanks, none too friendly. Very slowly, and unfolding the paper as he went, he walked to the front door, and stood there reading for a moment. When Carpentier, once more seated in his chair, saw the country gentleman, his shoulders bent as if with manual labour, cross the street on his way to the Luxembourg, he was seized with sudden alarm.

"He has grown old this winter," he thought. The possibility crossed his mind that he might, when he began to feel his years, resign his post, and leave Paris . . . that would indeed be a disaster for "No. 118." It was the senator and Mademoiselle Lefournier who were Carpentier's pride in a house where there would always be difficulties to contend with. If only they could keep these two tenants while their reign lasted. . . .

"Madame Guillard!" came a commanding voice from a man in grey and green uniform, who remained standing at the loge-door in a sullen attitude.

"Ground-floor on the right," Carpentier shouted back still louder and rather reluctantly.

Then he got up hastily, opened the glass door without a sound, and listened.

A long time elapsed before the door was opened. Finally the lock creaked and a hushed and eager woman's voice could be heard; the man stepped inside angrily and closed the door noisily behind him.

"There you have it again," thought Carpentier, "the new disgrace over my house, which I thought was clean for a while." He plucked at his moustache and his bad eye trembled with a foolish dejected sneer.

"Guillard! Valency with his fads! All the bother in connexion with the new tenant of the Levêque apartment, oh, oh, what a number of troubles. . . ."

Carpentier sighed. It was difficult to be a concierge. Madame Guillard would have to go sooner or later—you could not put up with people who brought to a quiet respectable house the disgrace of unpaid debts.

And Dr. Valency—as a matter of fact, he had never taken to that little Algerian fellow who always had his rooms full of foreign draperies and curtains, as if it were a harem, and who in winter, in his astrakhan cap, looked like a Siamese.

He had gone to warn the owner, who answered casually: "look here . . . a doctor . . . a scientific man . . . you really need not bother about him," and then he went on to talk about "adagio" and "piano," "pianissimo." Carpentier was worried to death.

And then the third difficulty . . . never in all his career as a concierge had he experienced a greater disappointment! When he had succeeded immediately in letting the apartment on the fourth floor to an aristocratic and pleasant-looking old widow lady, who gave her address at the house of a brother, a major in the artillery, and who was known, at any rate by name, to Mademoiselle Lefournier—he had been particularly pleased with this choice. But the following morning a young woman from No. 116 came and chatted to Hortense through the window—so nice for her and the children to have their mother so close . . . the little ones were looking forward to the daily visits to their grandmother. . . .

Hortense got the fright of her life.

Those little devils. She knew them only too well—in future they would always have this crowd on their polished staircase and the speckless stair-carpet, and there was nothing to be done!

To be a good concierge . . . "general knowledge of human nature . . . much tact . . ." his colleague of the house next door was in the habit of saying . . . well . . . they were certainly most useful assets.

An electric motor, shiny and black, slid noiselessly up to the house. The smart chauffeur opened the door wide and a young and distinguished lady got out. A visitor for Mademoiselle Lefournier!

"Is Mademoiselle Lefournier at home?" the chauffeur said sternly.

Carpentier did not really like this—when people like a senator could be friendly, what the dickens!—but he rose

obligingly, and said that he had not seen Mademoiselle go out.

"Yes, Madame, he thinks so," said the chauffeur in low tones, "would Madame prefer . . . ?"

"No, no, Joseph, it's all right," she said in a high-pitched voice—then walked across the pavement and into the front door—the next moment her slim silhouette glided past the loge-door. . . .

As the shadows lengthened and the afternoon, growing quieter, merged into evening, Carpentier's thoughts drifted into regions which had nothing to do with the government of the house.

The Rue de Bréa—Hortense had gone there again. . . . Camille was expecting a second child . . . rather soon . . . she was not too strong and they would not be able to pay the expenses of a second confinement . . . however, if only all went well . . . he was still hale and hearty and Hortense also . . . it would not be a great hardship to have to work one year longer . . . and the little Emile, what a darling . . . and so big for his five months! He had one tooth and could point out everything with his finger! . . . a treasure! . . . and Marcel was getting on well at his tailoring and Camille was so clever at managing her house and such a good needlewoman . . . no wonder, a milliner, a real lady. . . . Exactly what Marcel required, and it was wonderful to see how well she got on with Hortense, although she came of an entirely different stock. . . . Hortense worked like a nigger, there in the Rue de Bréa . . . nothing was too much for her. . . . She was proud of being able to do it. If only every one would do their share and save, then all would surely come right . . . he was glad that he could make things easier for his children than they had been for himself, if only they were happy together. . . .

Carpentier reclined far back in the chair, a hand stretched out on either knee and his head resting on his tie. His face

looked older than when he was in the midst of his daily work, but his expression was so peaceful and happy, that even his one bad eye, quietly closed, surrounded by waxy wrinkles, defenceless as the closed eyes of one who sleeps, looked good-natured and almost touching.

There was a slight noise at the front door. Angular and timid, in a blue cotton blouse with little white figures and a black lace toque, Madame Gros appeared—Gros, with protruding front, his head a little bowed and his hands dangling loosely on either side, shuffled along in her wake.

“How late they are to-day,” Carpentier thought disapprovingly. Wide awake, to attend to his house and his people with all their peculiarities. . . . “They have sat too long on their seat . . . you would think they owned it. . . .”

Then the front door clicked again; two forms, dressed identically the same in black sateen with a white scalloped collar under the pale faces, quietly crept through the hall—“The ghosts,” thought Carpentier, astonished. He knew that it must be half-past six, and wondered what had become of Hortense.

Then Monsieur Girard came home, and a little later Monsieur Bertin.

Of course if Hortense began to talk over there, he might have to wait for another half-hour. Louis was not exactly early either! As these thoughts passed through his mind, something brushed past the loge, a door banged, the motor slid off.

And inside, to shorten the time, which was beginning to hang heavily on his hands, he took the newspaper from the table, and began reading where he had left off.

Redwood Library

SELECTIONS FROM THE RULES

1. Three volumes may be taken at a time and only three on one share. Two unbound numbers of a monthly and three numbers of a weekly publication are counted as a volume.

2. Books other than 7-day and 14-day ones may be kept out 28 days. **Books cannot be renewed or transferred.**

3. Books overdue are subject to a fine of one cent a day for fourteen days, **and five cents a day for each day thereafter.**

4. Neglect to pay the fine will debar from the use of the Library.

5. No book is to be lent out of the house of the person to whom it is charged.

6. Any person who shall soil (deface) or damage or lose a book belonging to the Library shall be liable to such fine as the Directors may impose; or shall pay the value of the book or of the set, if it be a part of a set, as the Directors may elect. All scribbling or any marking or writing whatever, folding or turning down the leaves, as well as cutting or tearing any matter from a book belonging to the Library, will be considered defacement and damage.



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 SEP 16 1924
 OCT 25 1924
 NOV 12 1924
 DEC 10 1924
 MAY 13 1930
 MAR 30 1932
 JUL 1 '39
 NOV 1 '39
 AUG 21 '41
 JUN 12 1948

